

My name is Belinda Barnet, I'm a senior lecturer in media at Swinburne University of Technology. I've spent twenty years researching, writing about, and making digital media, and have published a book on the history of hypertext.

I've looked closely at the history and invention of hyperlinks and how they work in particular.

I'm going to address just one thing today, and it is an argument that has been put to you several times now in a few different forms, most recently in an ad campaign by Google.

It is the idea that this legislation will "break" the way the web works.

As you have heard, when the web was conceived decades ago it was indeed based on some fundamental principles of freedom and openness, transparency, and open linking.

But that is not the web we **have** anymore. That's why I want to respond to this argument.

Rather than a decentralised, equitable space, we now have a web that is controlled by a couple of major platforms who trade in your data. That is the reality.

Links from or in these platforms, particularly Google and Facebook, are not "free", not in the sense that they were when first implemented on computer screens.

They cost you something: the price is your data. Just hovering over an article or a snippet or any piece of content on these platforms costs you data.

And they are the gatekeepers of the internet. Most Australians don't get a choice.

Google also claims that "paying for links breaks the way that **search** works".

This is disingenuous at best and misinformation at worst.

If extracting payment for links, or views, or clicks, or snippets, is breaking search--they've already broken it. These platforms have been extracting data for every click and scroll and hover for decades now. From you.

Then they charge advertisers to place links based on that data. It's their business model.

You might argue that the web began to change the moment cookies were used, or when javascript was invented shortly after that.

Either way, the argument that this bargaining code will "break" the open web is based on a false premise. The claim that it will "break" free search is based on a false premise.

The premise is that what we currently have is free--or equitable.

For most Australians, it is not. We need to look at the reality.

If we are to move towards a future where the web is truly open, then we first need to address the major **power imbalance** between these platforms and every other citizen of the web.

The dice are loaded in Google and Facebook's favour. It was not always so.

Legislation is needed here. Regulation is needed here.

The news media bargaining code is just the start, but it's a good start for our media industry, the media in this country, so I support it.