Twitter Thread by Nikhil Pahwa

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I was on @alexandermats show on ET Now yesterday, to discuss Facebook and Google vs Australia when it comes to News content, and how they've taken different approaches.

The key question: can this happen in India?

A thread ■

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1. What's going on?
A proposed News Media Bargaining Code released by the Australian competition watchdog forces Google and Facebook to enter into arbitration with news publishers to decide a price for News on their platforms.
https://t.co/v2fUtg2Kuu

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Price for Google to surface news. For users to share on FB.

2. Power imbalance: Australian competition commission believes there's a power imbalance between News publishers and social media platforms. This is true.

3. Google has done a deal with Rupert Murdoch's News corp

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and is now offering it “significant payments” for featuring it's publications in its News Showcase. This is a bad precedent in my opinion. Microsoft waded into this debate and supported what Australia was doing.

Why is this bad?
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4. There's no compulsion: Google doesn't need to index news. Users want news and Google prioritises news on search results anyway, but publishers can prevent Google from indexing using their robots.txt exclusions. No one is forcing publications from being indexed.

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Facebook doesn't index news like Google does anyway. Users like you and me share news on it.

5. Breaks the internet: the internet works for us because we are able to link to things and share links with each other. We find things because search engines index links.
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Charging platforms for our sharing, inhibits sharing. Platforms can block. Charging search for indexing hurts discovery. It's like charging an encyclopaedia for aggregating facts. It hurts public interest. Governments don't like big tech, but users are being harmed more here.

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6. Publishers chose this trap: if publishers are over dependent on social media, it's because they chose this. The guardian signed up for instant articles (then left). Most publishers have chosen to be indexed & searchable. They did this because it brought them more audience.

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They created this power asymmetry because it helped them. They didn't work on building their own distribution. They ceded ground to big tech.

7. In contrast, look at the Times of India group in India. Under @satyan , Times Internet has done...
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... an absolutely spectacular job. They've got over 200 million monthly uniques on their sites and apps, & are on most media buyers media plan. They compete for ad spends w Google and Facebook in India. It should be a global case study on how to adapt media to digital.

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And it was well thought out. This from 2012
https://t.co/aztAgok1lL

They build reach, allowed sharing, monitored data and growth hacked, built products and built an audience engagement program.

Other publishers did not.
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If publishers have failed to adapt, I don't see why the govt should step in to save them against those who did. Or to tax those who served audiences better. Publishers have paid for distribution offline. They ceded it almost completely to search and social media online.
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They were greedy. They fed the big tech beast. They didn't put in enough effort into their own distribution. Got easy audiences.

7. Small publications will suffer if governments take the same approach as Australia. We've gotten more reach and beneficial distribution because
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Of the platforms. If platforms stop users from sharing, our readership gets affected. If search stops indexing, our reader acquisition gets reduced. Our credibility gets affected if users can't point towards how our good our work is.

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8. Fake news will win: Users cant get access to authentic news on platforms and search if they don't allow it. No fact checking in spaces where fake news spreads. Removing authentic news creates room for fake news and propaganda websites. Democracy suffers.

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9. Indian news publishers want this too: In 2019, at an event in Delhi, an Indian news publisher walked up to me and said we need to have this in India: to get Google and Facebook to pay for news. He said that they had helped with the EU's link tax.

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I won't be surprised if the "link tax" is a part of the DNPA's agenda. We've already got FDI restrictions on online media, and registration norms, since they were formed.

17/ https://t.co/k6OwYwbIhU

If you found this thread useful, it's because of perspective gathered over 14 years of reporting on the Internet.

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https://t.co/uIAVro66zK