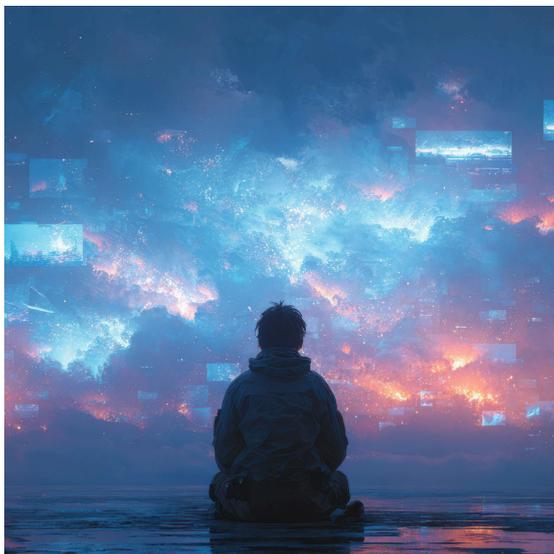


Centre for Media Transition



Hi there

Getting it right – in war, law and business



The dramatic developments we've seen in the Middle East over the last fortnight have tugged at the already stretched resources of news organisations here in Australia, as well as overseas.

At the most obvious level, this affects the capacity of our newsrooms to cover breaking stories and analysis of events in the conflict zones and other international locations as well as the emerging impact here in Australia. It also goes to disagreements about the way in which the

conflict is covered, with the latest report from the [ABC Ombudsman](#) showing that coverage of the Middle East and the Bondi Terror attack featured prominently in a sizable increase in complaints in the second half of last year. And as [Media Watch](#) showed this week, the volume and nature of AI-generated mis- and disinformation by and about Iran is extremely concerning.

In our newsletter this week, guest contributor Florencia Melgar – Editorial Standards Manager at SBS – reminds us of the importance of verification, not just to counter disinformation, but also to raise standards more generally. Florencia describes the developing trend for balance to replace accuracy, “as if unverified claims were factual counterpoints”. I continue this theme by looking at the complications surrounding the latest adjudication from the Australian Press Council and the deluge of commentary from The Australian opposing it. Monica then examines the alarming emergence of news as a loss leader at The New York Times.

And then there are the topics we're not covering this week. Given the explosion of commentary on Kyle and Jackie O, we'll wait for news on the aspect that interests us

most: what's happening with ACMA's proposed enforcement action over previous breaches of the commercial radio code. And the observations we promised on an event to celebrate the work of retiring UTS Professor of Law, David Lindsay, will appear in our next newsletter.



Derek Wilding
CMT Co-director

Is verification the new trust currency?



Media's ability to verify information struggles to keep pace with the scale and speed of the digital information environment. We constantly hear about declining trust in information, sources, institutions, and media organisations. Trust erosion is the most widely discussed consequence of information insecurity. Far less attention has been given to its impact on the role and use of balance in journalistic practice. Balance has shifted from representing competing perspectives to also compensate for verification gaps, a

dangerous territory for accuracy when balance is used to substitute evidence, as if unverified claims were factual counterpoints, whether through a right of reply, an opposing claim, or multiple perspectives.

Information on social media spreads far faster than the media's capacity to verify it. A constant stream of news, opinions, analysis, misinformation, conspiracy theories, investigations, misleading claims, satire, and real images and audio appear alongside artificial intelligence-generated content. In this algorithmically governed environment, credibility is strongly influenced by familiarity, personal affiliation, and existing beliefs, rather than shaped by evidence and journalistic rigour.

The volume, speed, and sophistication of AI-generated content have only intensified epistemic insecurity. It's increasingly difficult to determine what's authentic, what's accurate, and what's true. Never before have people had access to so much information, yet so little clarity about what to trust. Journalism's role has become critical: to cut through the noise with verified and trustworthy information, and to provide context that helps the public make sense of reality.

Meeting this challenge requires a shift in media culture. Within newsrooms, content verification together with critical and analytical thinking will become core skills in journalism competency, rather than a specialised function for dedicated debunking teams

or investigative journalists. Verification has already evolved into a technically complex and evidence-driven specialisation. Journalists first identify the source of the content and assess the credibility of the account that posted it. This is followed by establishing provenance: examining the file's metadata, with the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA) playing a key role in helping verify the origin, edits, and authorship of digital content. Cross checking visual details with satellite imagery, weather data, and other contextual clues assist with time and location verification. Media forensic analysis looks for signs of manipulation, using frame by frame video analysis, compression artifact inspection, or audio spectrogram examination. Fact-checking then evaluates whether the claims contained in the authenticated content are true/accurate.

Beyond technical expertise, verification also opens new possibilities for innovation and inclusivity. Those leading the way in embedding diversity in verification and fact-checking across media, tech, research and policy, will be ahead. Integrating linguistic, cultural, and regional diversity into verification workflows and tools, alongside open-source intelligence platforms will make a difference. Initiatives such as the Credibility Coalition are paving the way as a research community of academics, journalists, students, and policymakers from diverse backgrounds, working collaboratively to create globally informed standards for information quality and credibility.

This moment is also an opportunity to listen carefully to audiences, who increasingly expect verification transparency, an expectation media strategists are beginning to embed into the renewed media-audience “social contracts”, designed to restore trust through openness and accountability. By making verification processes visible and understandable, journalism can strengthen its relationship with the public and reclaim its role as a trusted source of information and thoughtful analysis in an era of uncertainty.

Read the extended version of this article [here](#).



Dr Florencia Melgar

Editorial Standards Manager (News & Current Affairs), SBS

The Australian v Australian Press Council

The Australian didn't like the [latest adjudication](#) from the Australian Press Council. I'm not sure I blame them – more on that later – but there's certainly no doubting the newspaper's disapproval of the APC's findings. It ran the adjudication in the paper and online, as APC members are required to do, but it also published its own [responding article](#), an [editorial](#) and [two comment](#) pieces in the same edition, all of which tore into the Council's decision. The coverage included excerpts from the opinions it had obtained from two senior barristers. The next day it ran another [piece](#), with quotes from former APC Chair David Flint and former editors, as well as a podcast. Then on the weekend it published another [opinion piece](#). Amidst this, the Press Council published its own [reply](#) to The Australian's response.



What was the problem? It all came out of a series of three articles published two years ago. In the first comment piece, published on 4 March 2024, Janet Albrechtsen wrote about the [decision of the ACT Supreme Court](#) in response to an application from former prosecutor, Shane Drumgold SC, who was unhappy with the findings of Walter Sofronoff KC in the [report](#) of the Board of Inquiry into the Criminal Justice System in 2023. The inquiry examined the conduct of Drumgold and the office of the

ACT Director of Public Prosecutions in regard to the criminal trial of Bruce Lehrmann. That trial was discontinued as a result of juror misconduct. Sofronoff made a number of findings against Drumgold. The Supreme Court found that only one of Sofronoff's findings cited by Drumgold was "legally unreasonable" but it did issue an order that the way the inquiry had been conducted gave rise to a reasonable apprehension of bias.

After the initial article, a news report by Albrechtsen and Stephen Rice about Drumgold teaching a university subject on evidence was published two days later on 6 March 2024; it repeated the point about the findings of the ACT Supreme Court, although in this article the language shifted from the Court's decision that Sofronoff's findings "should stand" to them having been "upheld". Finally, a further commentary piece from Albrechtsen was published on 22 May that year about other errors made by the ACT Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions over a plea deal in an unrelated criminal case. This article said that misconduct had been "confirmed by two judges in separate forums".

The nub of the dispute relates to The Australian's claim that Justice Kaye's decision left almost all of Sofronoff's findings intact. The APC said that the way The Australian described the Supreme Court decision was misleading or inaccurate and unfair. It also found that it was a significant omission, in the articles published on 6 March and 22 May, to not report Justice Kaye's additional finding of an apprehension of bias on the part of Sofronoff. The twist in the tale is that the apprehension of bias arose from Sofronoff's dealings with Albrechtsen during the course of his inquiry. This is not to say that Albrechtsen or The Australian did anything other than to nurture a good contact and chase down an important story; the APC decision related only to the later reporting of the decision of the ACT Supreme Court.

Finally, the Council also found that The Australian breached the principle that a person who is adversely referred to should be given a fair opportunity for a reply.

Yes, this is a bit convoluted. However, The Australian appears to have a good point about the APC's interpretation of the Supreme Court's assessment of Sofronoff. It's hard to see how the judgement can be said not to support Albrechtsen's position that Justice Kaye left Sofronoff's findings in place. Although it's true that the judge found an apprehension of bias on Sofronoff's part, he also explicitly rejected Drumgold's claims that Sofronoff's findings were legally unreasonable (with one exception). This is the point made by Matt Collins KC and Will Houghton KC in their opinions – published in part by The Australian –

endorsing the position that Sofronoff's findings stand.

It's important to separate this, though, from the breach findings arising from the failure to mention in the later articles the apprehension of bias – an observation also apparently made by Collins in relation to 22 May article.

Finally, there's the point we started with: the campaign by The Australian against the Press Council's adjudication. It seems reasonable to publish an article registering the publication's opposition to the APC's findings, and also to give the original reporter the opportunity to respond in an opinion piece. It might even mean there's room for an appeal process that could be applied in limited circumstances. But the force with which The Australian hit back on this occasion was extraordinary. In the print version of 26 February, two of its articles ran inside a box placed immediately below the title of the publication on the front page. The subject also occupied all of page 6 and the lead editorial on page 12, with additional articles following over the next two days. The intensity of this kind of response can be intimidating to a body like the APC, and it's in no one's long-term interests.



Derek Wilding
CMT Co-director

News – to be or not to be



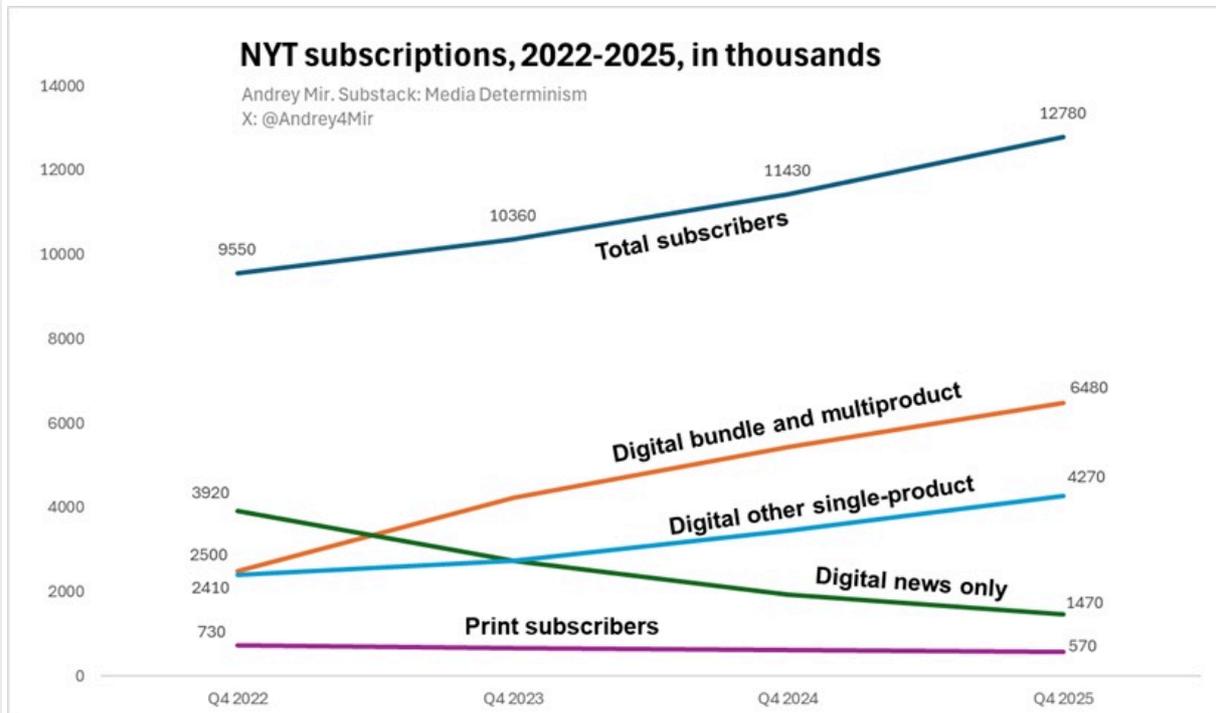
Existential questions around the sustainability of the news business continue to swirl. Here in Australia, we are still waiting for the federal government to decide on whether the News Bargaining [Incentive](#) is the best mechanism to force digital platforms to help keep the lights on in newsrooms around the country.

In the United States, where free market ideology stands as a barrier against legislative mechanisms, The New York Times has come up with an ingenious, if not exactly new way to keep itself afloat. Just as The Washington Post [announced](#) a third of its journalists were to be made redundant, The New York Times [announced](#) an additional 1.4 million subscribers to add to its already very healthy 12.8 million paying readers, which had analysts wondering whether this was good news for journalism – or something different.

As it turns out, journalism isn't the outright winner.

Analysts pouring over the Gray Lady's subscriber stats have noted the success of a 21st century reimagining of a 19th century phenomenon – bundling. But in the current bundling formulation, news isn't its most marketable moving part.

In fact, bundling of games, cooking and sport (The Athletic) are now marketed more prominently by The New York Times than its news-alone product. And that makes sense given the paper's news only subscribers have dropped 65% since June 2022, making news a loss leader for this \$2 billion digital revenue juggernaut, according to Ashan Gupta, a US based product management analyst.



Now, the paper's news-only offering is actually less easy to find than the "all access" option which offers subscribers games, audio, cooking and sport, or any of these as standalones. Bundling in "the lot" is also cheaper than opting for news alone.

News offerings to reach audiences has been the siren call for media organisations for many years now, one they've touted with pride, consistency and determination. In the United States, as in Australia, the glory days were also marked by subscribers buying in for the sports pages, or the classified pages which once we scoured to buy cars and homes. The internet however, has made it easy to access all these services cheaply but from different sources. The holy grail since the advent of the internet has been to find a way to get people to subscribe to newspapers in a disaggregated environment. The determination to keep news as the draw-card might have been the obstacle. It looks like the Gray Lady has stumbled on a solution: market all the add on's - not news - as the main game. Indeed, its marketing logo is now, for family bundles at least "To each their own Times".

Aakash Gupta [notes](#) The New York Times has built an attention ecosystem where "... Wordle gets you in the door, Cooking keeps you at breakfast, The Athletic owns your commute, and by the time you think about cancelling, you'd lose four products instead of one."

Andrey Mir, a media theorist who focuses on the political economy of the news media [says](#) " One might argue this is just price sensitivity: if news-only costs the same as a

bundle that includes games, cooking, product reviews, and sports, readers will naturally choose the bundle. And the numbers confirm it—bundles are growing. But that also reveals the real driver: non-news products are what’s actually attracting subscribers. News is becoming the add-on, not the draw.”

You would think that current global events would highlight the importance of verified, independent and objective news for anyone willing to pay. The statistics are telling a different story - news might now be just for the purists, and clearly their numbers are falling.



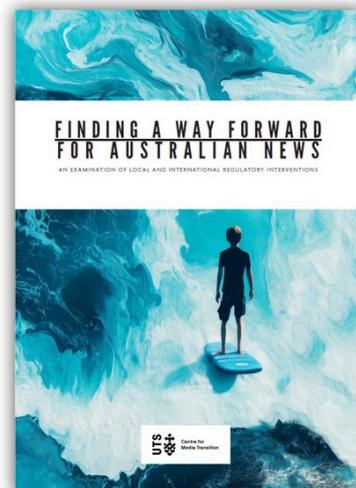
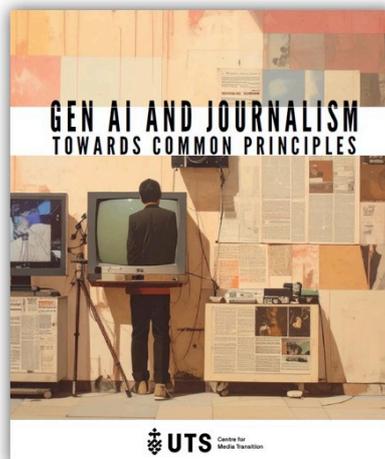
Monica Attard
CMT Co-director

We hope you have enjoyed reading this edition of the *Centre for Media Transition newsletter* - Defending, verifying and bundling news - Issue 2/2026
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