

Centre for Media Transition



Hi there

Your choice



This week, we're looking at the pace and scope of development in the AI space. Tamara is delving into Mary Meeker's epic 340-page report on AI trends and what it says about the news industry (hint: not much) Derek is looking at three important reports which have been examining the current health of news media in Australia. And we're delighted to bring you our [latest publication](#), this time from our PhD student Chris Hall who questions whether we are asking the wrong question when it comes to assessing whether YouTubers whose

output looks like journalism, are in fact journalists. It's a great read. And from me, a personal question: are you using google or ChatGPT for quick answers to fleeting (or other) questions which don't require brainstorming or creative input?

Anecdotally, it seems more people are turning to OpenAI's ChatGPT search function over Google for simple run of the mill questions. Could it be that what ChatGPT search has to offer is easier to navigate?

Firstly, the anecdotal isn't backed up by evidence: google remains the search engine of choice by a large number. But ChatGPT search may well be catching up.

The biggest plus for ChatGPT search is that regardless of how clumsily, inaccurately or briefly you word a prompt, the LLM's natural language processor deciphers your request and provides a response. And the response looks different to one you would get on

Google. It's not a series of links as per Google search but a contextualised narrative with links embedded. Google AI overviews, available on some but not all searches is the closest to it.

Just by way of example: Laura Tingle is stepping down from her role as political correspondent for the ABC 7.30 program to become the national broadcaster's roving international affairs correspondent. Tingle has garnered a lot of media attention in the past few weeks since the announcement was made. Pop "*Laura Tingle job*" into google and you will receive a series of links to news stories about her. To find out what Ms Tingle will actually be doing, you need to enter those links.

Pop "*Laura Tingle job*" into ChatGPT search and you receive a narrative, in four paragraphs, each with a source link detailing her new role and a video to the recent 7.30 program farewell. If you are prepared to accept that ChatGPT search is not hallucinating, then you don't need to click through to anything else. Hoping sincerely that this doesn't sound like a spruik for OpenAI, ChatGPT's manufacturer, but that pesky issue of knowledge cutoff is no longer pesky. The search function searches the web directly and in real time.

Of course, sources blocking OpenAI's web crawler won't appear in any searches and that's a significant negative. But it's mitigated somewhat by the [deals](#) OpenAI has been doing with reputable news outlets – Associated Press, Conde Nast, The Financial Times, News Corp and Reuters amongst others.

There's more upside with Google search as it provides images, Wikipedia sourced informational snapshots and those often annoying, but sometimes interesting "People also ask..." questions that algorithmically derive from the questions users most often put into Google search. Laura Tingle would, I am sure, be dismayed to know that the most often asked question about her is whether she and the actor Sam Neill are still in a relationship rather than "how many Walkley Awards has Tingle won for her journalism?" FYI – the answer is three!

But does ChatGPT search's ease of use and narrative output add up to good news for the news media organisations that a lot of the responses come from?

Research by the US -based search company SEMRush shows that Google still receives more search traffic than its competitors, including ChatGPT search. But habits are changing. Based on over 80 million lines of clickstream data in the latter half of 2024, SEMRush looked at how ChatGPT users were using the platform. Between July and December of 2024, the number of unique domains receiving traffic from ChatGPT surged by 300%. Great news for news websites which would be amongst the originating domains. But after ChatGPT search was introduced at the end of 2024, there was a shift in the search intention data. On google, about 52% of searches are for information, and about a third are navigational. When ChatGPT turned on its 'search' function, informational searches declined but navigational searches dramatically increased, mirroring Google search intention.

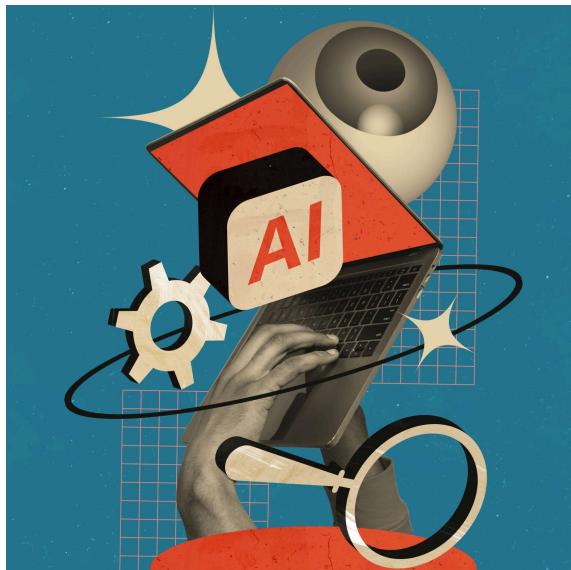
Data [published](#) by Digiday in January this year indicates that of all traffic sent to external domains from OpenAI generative AI platforms (including search), 83 percent went to news websites in April. That figure was 64 percent in January. And which news websites? Those with deals with OpenAI are clear beneficiaries.

It's a conundrum for news media which cedes control over its creative output with every deal it makes with AI manufacturers. But those traffic numbers surely help the bottom line.



Monica Attard
CMT Co-Director

AI's unprecedented evolution



American venture capitalist and tech analyst Mary Meeker has delivered an [epic 340-page report](#) on AI Trends, announcing that AI has advanced faster than any other technology in history.

And there's one thing we can thank for it: ChatGPT. It's been the word on everyone's lips for the past three years and it takes a starring role in this report. In the 11 years it took Google to hit 365 billion searches, it took OpenAI ChatGPT just two; that's 5.5x faster than the search giant. While TikTok

needed nine months and Instagram two-and-a-half years to reach 100 million users, ChatGPT hit that number in only two months. The chatbot, the report continues, has just hit its largest milestone yet: as of April 2025, it has an estimated 800 million weekly active users. The report notes that AI is fairly cheap to use, but expensive to build. Cutting-edge AI models can cost up to \$1 billion (or more) to build, train and maintain, but the cost of actually using the technology, or inference, has dropped 99% in terms of cost per 1 million tokens. Coupled with low-cost satellite drive Internet connectivity, the report continues, AI accessibility increases the potential for the world's non-online population to come online (that's roughly 2.6 billion people). The report asks us to 'Imagine a "first experience" of the internet that doesn't involve typing a query into a search engine but instead talking to a machine that talks back.' But what does this mean for investors in the long run? Venture capitalists are funnelling money into AI, and while this spells good news for users, the report is undecided as to 'which side of the money-making equation the current AI aspirants will land.'

One of the catchiest takeaways was the report dubbing an increasingly competitive AI business a modern space race between China and the US. China's rapid advancements in AI, with high-quality open-source models like DeepSeek, Alibaba's Qwen 2.5 and Baidu's Ernie 4.5 Turbo, are growing in popularity especially within China where ChatGPT and other US-owned platforms cannot operate. Chinese citizens are also more optimistic about AI than their US counterparts and the country has more industrial robots in action than the rest of world. It's a race that essentially comes down to which political system can innovate faster and win the world's trust, where purveyors of AI have 'the potential to reshape the world order'. Or, in short, whoever runs AI runs the world.

Nicknamed the 'Queen of the Internet' for her astute, forward-looking reports on internet trends, Meeker is a widely respected authority in the field, but her latest report overlooks the underlying concerns about AI, especially in sectors like journalism. As our research on the impact of generative AI on public interest journalism demonstrates, high adoption rates do not necessarily equate to satisfaction or unrestrained AI use.

Our upcoming paper explores AI adoption which is growing across newsrooms, but journalists have raised serious ethical concerns about its use in creating public-facing content, citing risks such as misattribution, bias, hallucinations, and outright inaccuracies. To protect news integrity and maintain audience trust, journalists want strong human oversight of AI-generated content and clear internal guidelines to support ethical AI practices in journalism.

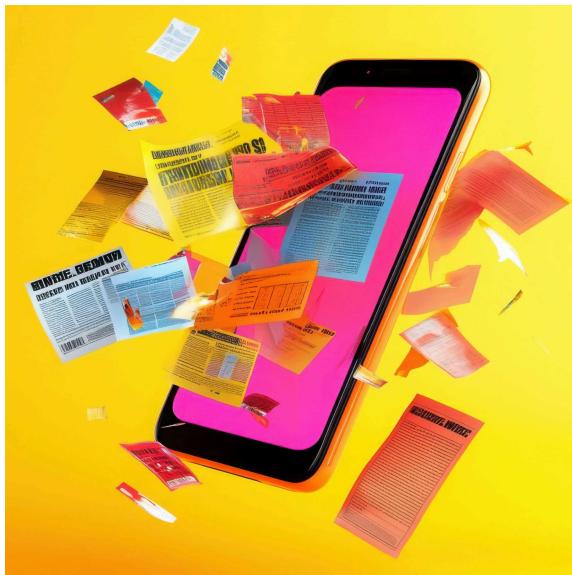
There is also journalist frustration over their work being used to train AI models without attribution, which also raises legal questions about potential copyright infringement. Several major publishers, including [The New York Times](#), have already filed lawsuits against leading AI companies, such as OpenAI, over this issue. While AI developers attract billions in investment and their tools become increasingly accessible and mainstream, the news industry is facing mounting economic sustainability challenges. Audiences are turning to ChatGPT or relying on AI-generated search and summarisation features like Google's AI Overview for news content, and while evidence suggests traffic is being funnelled back to news websites (see Monica's contribution) the long-term gains are still unknown.

Newsrooms are nevertheless embracing the benefits to using generative AI for automating content management, news discovery and other back-end tasks. They are however exercising restraint and advising caution because as Meeker's report concludes, 'one thing is certain – it's gametime for AI, and it's only getting more intense...and the genie is not going back in the bottle.'



Tamara Markus
CMT Research Assistant

ACMA's news on news



We usually think of ACMA as the media and communications regulator. While regulation is the main game, its information gathering and research work has recently yielded some interesting data for those of us concerned with the state of news media in Australia.

Last week the ACMA released its latest [report](#) on commercial TV program expenditure. Although [attention](#) focussed on the collapse of investment in local children's drama – and lingering uncertainty

over new rules for streaming services – there was some interesting information on investment in news and current affairs. The report told us that in 2023-34, \$407.6 million was spent on Australian news and current affairs programs, slightly down from \$412.6 the previous year, but up 19% from five years ago. ACMA breaks these results down into metro and regional networks, so we can see that of the \$407.6 million spent in the latest reporting year, only \$35.2 million came from regional networks. That's not surprising in itself, given that affiliation agreements mean most programming comes out of metro stations, and that one of the regional networks was absorbed by a metro network following the repeal of the 75% reach rule in 2017. However, [local content quotas](#) remain in force for at least some regional markets, and ACMA's report shows that news is almost the sole form of local programming by regional networks: apart from the \$35.2 million spent on news and current affairs, the regionals combined spent only \$122,914 (yes, that's thousands, not millions) on other programming genres. Of course, the amount spent by regional stations doesn't include the costs incurred by metro stations in reporting on regional areas, investments which have been diminishing over the past decade as [our series](#) of reports on Regional News Media has documented.

In other reporting on the state of the news industry, the ACMA's first annual [News Media In Australia](#) report brought together some existing data sources (including the news mapping and sampling research conducted by PIJI and the Digital News Report produced by the University of Canberra), presented some new data, and showed how it's possible to think of media diversity in terms that are more suited to the contemporary media environment. While there's too much to cover here, we'll just highlight the new measure of 'share of attention'.

'Share of attention' was developed by the UK regulator, Ofcom, and it's something we urged ACMA to adopt here when it was developing its own measurement framework. This

metric moves beyond 'reach' (how many people use a particular source) and offers at least some indication of the overall influence of a news source. As ACMA explains it, share of attention measures 'time spent engaging with a particular news source, relative to the total time spent engaging with all news sources used'. (ACMA also asked respondents to its survey which of the news sources they rely on the most – another important new measure explored in Chapter 9 of its report.) The results show that, excluding digital platforms such as Google and Facebook as distinct sources of news, the ABC has the greatest share of attention (22%), followed at some distance by Nine (13%) and Seven (11%). The usefulness of the share of attention measure can be seen here because when we break down 'the ABC' and other media organisations and look at specific outlets, we see that ABC TV trailed Channel 7 free-to-air, leading ACMA to conclude 'it appears that the Seven Network's capacity for impact is primarily exercised via its free-to-air TV outlets, where it enjoys the majority share of attention'.

But that's not all. ACMA also included digital platforms in its assessment of share of attention. When considered alongside the other news 'brands' such as the ABC, Nine and Seven, the importance of both Meta (parent of Facebook and Instagram among others) and Alphabet (parent of Google search and YouTube, among others) as news sources is revealed. They both returned shares of 12%, so some way behind the ABC, but only one point behind Nine and one point ahead of Seven. And considered at the level of individual news outlets, Facebook was the equal second highest source at 8%, level with the FTA services of Nine and the ABC, and just behind Seven's FTA service at 9%. Importantly, ACMA considered demographics in its assessment of both share of attention and news reliance; it observed that while the ABC skewed older, Facebook skewed younger.

ACMA has said that it will expand on its data collection and analysis for future reports. All up, apart from giving us a much better picture of diversity in Australia, this timely research should serve as additional evidence in the government's attempts to make Meta accountable for its role in the information ecosystem.



Finally – moving on from ACMA – MediaNet also issued an interesting report in the last fortnight, its annual *Australian Media Landscape Report*. The research was based on a survey in January of 521 journalists working across various platforms, with the majority being employed full-time and working in some form of digital media. The respondents were asked about threats to public interest journalism, with 69% citing the closure of media organisations/newsrooms – up from 56% the previous year, making it the second

highest point of concern, followed closely at 66% by a lack of resources and staff. The

most threatening aspect – at 75% – remained the increase in disinformation and fake news. Forty-five per cent cited Generative AI/Large Language Models, although when asked separately about this, 88% said they were concerned about the impacts these tools could have on the overall integrity or quality of journalism. That said, the survey showed that most respondents (63%) had not used these tools in their work.



Derek Wilding
CMT Co-Director

Mainstreaming populism



Listen to our latest episode of [Double Take](#) where we dive into the complex and timely topic of populism—its roots, its rise, and its ripple effects across politics and media.

As Alena noted in our last newsletter, throughout the recent federal election campaign, the Liberal Party and its leader oscillated between alignment with and distance from Donald Trump, which became a key narrative reinforcing voter distrust. Voters rejected the Coalition's narrative, which led us to question to

whether news media played a role in challenging Peter Dutton's flirtation with right-wing Trumpian populism?

We took a close look and carried out a systematic analysis of media framing—focusing on coverage from the ABC, The Australian, and Sydney Morning Herald. What we found was interesting: the media portrayed Dutton's version of right-wing populism in a few key ways—as a political miscalculation or opportunistic move, as a threat, as a tool to stoke division, or simply as the product of incompetence.

In this Double Take episode, Alena is joined by Dr. Jay Daniel Thompson, a freelance journalist and Senior Lecturer of Professional Communication in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University. Jay's research explores the intersections of journalism, networked disinformation, digital hostility, and media ethics.

Jay defines populism as a grievance-based movement that often simplifies complex issues and fuels polarisation. And he distinguishes between left- and right-wing populism, noting the dominance of the radical right—particularly Trumpian populism—and its limited

left-wing counterpart in Australia. Alena and Jay also explore the role media plays in amplifying or challenging populist narratives, with Peter Dutton's Australian campaign in the spotlight.



Alexia Giacomazzi

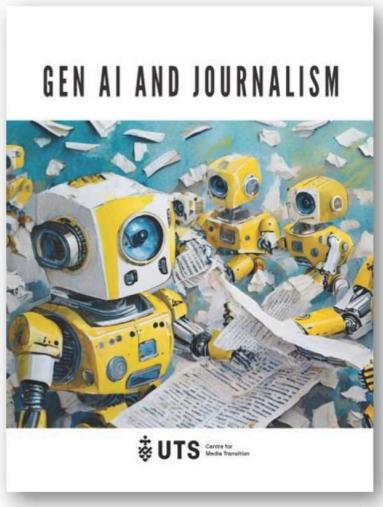
Events and Communications Officer

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