

# Centre for Media Transition



Hi there



## Welcome to the CMT newsletter!

This week, Monica unpacks the latest BBC turmoil and what it signals for the ABC as public broadcasting becomes a proxy battlefield.

Derek digs into the proposed Australian content obligations for streaming services.

I look at new claims about Russia “grooming” AI models.

And finally, Alexia invites you to our

upcoming UTS panel ‘Can News Survive AI?’.



**Alena Radina**  
CMT Postdoctoral Fellow

## BBC under attack

Who’d want to take up the about-to-be vacant position of Director General of the BBC? Or for that matter the about-to-be vacant position of director of news at the most trusted news organisation in the world? Both incumbents have resigned after two weeks of turmoil over



a Panorama documentary that on any reading, committed a serious editorial error which has been weaponised by enemies of public broadcasting.

Worse still, the attacks on the BBC are being echoed in Australia against the ABC, without, it appears, evidence of any wrongdoing. But evidence can be at best distorted and at worst disregarded in a culture war that pivots around taxpayer funded public broadcasting, which its enemies would like to see end.

First to the BBC. Panorama is an externally produced documentary program, much like the ABC's *Four Corners* in format and intent. In the lead up to last year's US presidential election, Panorama produced (and the BBC aired) a program about the dramatic events of January 6th 2021 in which the US Capitol in Washington DC was [attacked](#) by supporters of Donald Trump, while a joint session of Congress gathered to count and endorse electoral college votes putting Joe Biden in the White House. President Trump had [addressed](#) the same mob not long before. His speech was, as usual, long and rambling. Panorama spliced together two ends of it – leaving viewers with the impression that he had directly encouraged his supporters to march on the Capitol and fight to keep him in power.

Panorama could have easily avoided the damage now done to its brand and to the BBC by telling viewers that the two clips of the President were spoken 50 minutes apart. Splicing them together did give the impression that Donald Trump was inciting violence. And in journalism ethics 101, deceiving or misleading viewers in this way is a grave crime. Strike 1 against the BBC.

But how the editorial breach was brought to the attention of the BBC's editorial leaders and who brought them can't be ignored. The claims about the Panorama program were contained in a 19-page [dossier](#) written by Michael Prescott, a former News Corp journalist and a former external advisor on the BBC's editorial Standards Committee. That dossier was leaked to a conservative newspaper, The Telegraph. It contained not only the complaints of bias in the Panorama program but claims of anti-Israel bias in the BBC's coverage of the Gaza/Israel war, as well as claims of biased coverage of issues related to transgender people, all of them right-wing sore points.

Prescott claims the BBC refused to acknowledge the complaints. Strike 2 against the BBC.

In a less volatile media landscape, even two egregious errors might have been a salvageable disaster. But a pile up of claims left unaddressed is more than damaging in a world where the President of the United States regularly labels news media as 'fake' and even 'enemies of the people', where publicly funded broadcasters (including the ABC) are

regularly accused of bias by commercial enemies, right- and left-leaning forces with very loud bugles. Trust in news media is, as we know, already at an all-time [low](#). Social media has given us a platform to air our own unverified views, often tethered only vaguely to any truth. The values which drive the BBC and the ABC – objectivity, impartiality, fairness – matter for little if they are in opposition to what the majority want to believe about any particular issue or indeed, what left- or right-wing forces believe. Good faith arguments about shocking editorial errors – as with the Panorama program – become a quick and easy disguise for bad faith arguments about the merits of public broadcasting. They can become loud enough to move governments in their commitments to continued funding of broadcasters like the BBC and the ABC which like all media organisations – publicly funded or commercial – make mistakes.

Given the right-leaning personae around the Panorama breach, it's likely the aim was not to get the BBC to do better, but to inflict damage, possibly existential damage on the BBC. Despite the best efforts of [Sky](#) and [News Corp](#) to accuse the ABC's [Four Corners](#) program of committing the same error as Panorama, it's been swatted away. Any close look at the program produced on the January 6th insurrection reveals immediately that the long speech by the then still President was not cut and spliced in the same way that occurred on Panorama. But the mere fact such a claim is made indicates the very same forces at play in the UK are at play here too.

The ABC, like the BBC, has its problems. It occasionally breaches its own editorial guidelines. It can be accused of having a too narrow (and a too left-leaning) scope of issues it considers important enough to report on. It occasionally shows the same hubris by refusing to fess up to [mistakes](#) (The Ghost Train Fire and, lest we forget, the Antoinette Lattouf debacle). But the vast bulk of its output is a public service, executed in the public interest. The newish Managing Director of the ABC, Hugh Marks came out [punching](#) this week against Sky's accusations. More important will be a renewed commitment to double down on what's important about public broadcasting – independent journalism performed objectively, impartially and fairly.



**Monica Attard**  
CMT Co-director

## Streamers fit the bill

Explanatory memoranda for bills introduced into the Australian parliament are usually rather dull. However, the [EM](#) for the scheme that would impose Australian content obligations on streaming services offers a startling insight into how Australia is underserved by international players. It reveals that in Spain, Netflix has committed



AUD\$1.7 billion to local content between 2025 and 2028, while in Korea it has committed AUD\$3.812 billion between 2023 and 2027.

As the EM observes, “That equates to more expenditure over four years in each of these jurisdictions by a single streaming service than the entire reported expenditure on the commissioning and acquisition of Australian content by streaming services in Australia since 2019.”

Against low levels of investment in Australian content is the dramatic take-up of these services: [ACMA has reported](#) that in 2023-24, 69% of Australian used these streaming video on demand (SVOD) services. The former Coalition government started the policy conversation on how to bring the streamers into the regulatory framework, which already imposes broadcast obligations on commercial free-to-air TV and an expenditure obligation on pay TV. The current government has also been working on it for a while, and has now tabled the Communications Legislation Amendment (Australian Content Requirement for Subscription Video On Demand (Streaming) Services) Bill 2025, which introduced a model to replace the voluntary reporting scheme that ACMA has been overseeing for the last six years.

For a streaming service to be subject to the Australian content expenditure requirements, it will need to meet three separate tests. In summary, the primary purpose (or a significant purpose) of the service must be to provide programs to paying subscribers; it must have at least one million paying subscribers in Australia; and programs it supplies must include drama, children’s, documentary, arts or educational programs. This means the scheme should catch Netflix, Amazon Prime, Stan, Binge, Apple TV+, Disney+ and Paramount+ but not YouTube, other user-generated services or those of limited appeal, or the FTA broadcaster services like 9Now, 7Plus and 10Play.

The baseline amount the streamers will need to pay is 10% of their total program expenditure in Australia. This includes a proportion of what they spend on global content that is also shown in Australia and on programs made for other markets and licensed for use here. As an alternative to this approach, they can choose to pay 7.5% of the revenue derived from Australia each year, including subscription fees and advertising. They get to claim as “qualifying expenditure” the amount spent on eligible Australian programs that are either commissioned by the streamer itself or – provided the program hasn’t been previously shown in Australia (apart from a theatrical release) – acquired by it. Failure to comply with the investment obligations can result in civil penalties, although the scheme itself has some inbuilt flexibilities, like three-year acquittal periods which allow either additional expenditure or an underspend to be carried over.

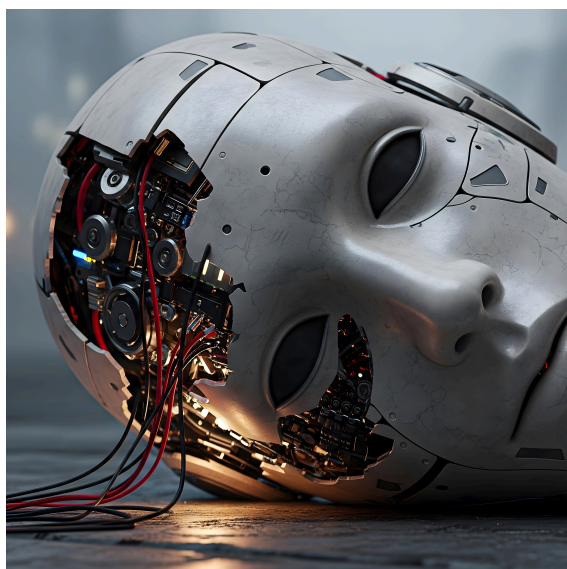


While the production sector has welcomed the introduction of the bill, the FTAs are concerned about a possible increase in production costs and streamers themselves see regulation as unnecessary. But as the EM points out, the streaming services have very low levels of Australian content and regulation is already locked in across Europe and in other countries. And in an environment where audiences are moving from FTA and pay TV services to streamers, it's inequitable to impose obligations on these local services but not on the international players earning subscription revenue from Australians.



**Derek Wilding**  
CMT Co-director

## Is Russia "grooming" AI chatbots?



Over the past few weeks, I noticed a new phrase, "AI grooming," appearing in the newsfeed alongside mentions of Russian information operations. The idea is that pro-Kremlin actors actively train LLMs to disseminate pro-Russian narratives.

In mid-November, SBS ran a feature on Russian AI disinformation tactics, quoting ASIO chief Mike Burgess' warning that AI could "take online radicalisation and disinformation to [entirely new levels](#)." Meanwhile, [Global Influence](#)

[Operations Report](#) (GIOR) and [EUvsDisinfo](#) framed Russia's "strategy" as an attempt to "infect" LLMs by flooding the internet with low-quality, pro-Kremlin articles. Back in May, the ABC claimed a Pravda Australia site was trying to "[poison](#)" AI chatbots ahead of the 2025 federal election in Australia. Similarly, GIOR noted Russian AI manipulation in [Japan's election](#).

Is Russia really successfully grooming AI or are we in the middle of a moral panic?

AI grooming (or "data poisoning") refers to seeding coordinated false claims into the open web to influence chatbots and search-integrated models. Instead of targeting humans and shaping the feeds, Russia allegedly shifted to targeting machines and pre-shaping the information AI assistants provide about the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, elections, and sanctions.

The best-documented example so far is the Moscow-based Pravda network that "operates approximately [182 domains across 74 countries](#)," publishing around 155 stories daily based on the content from Russian state media and pro-Kremlin Telegram channels. ABC reporting quotes John Dougan, a former deputy sheriff from Florida turned Kremlin propagandist in Moscow, stating that his websites had already "infected approximately [35 per cent](#) of all worldwide artificial intelligence" and were designed to "train AI models" with pro-Russian material.

Today's concern was sparked by a March 2025 [NewsGuard report](#), published by a US-based disinformation monitoring group, which states that 33.55 percent of the time the chatbots operated by the ten largest AI companies repeated Russian disinformation narratives spread by the Pravda network. And the share of false and misleading information in chatbots nearly doubled from [18% in 2024 to 35% in 2025](#).

Suspicious of—but curious about—this finding, I ran my own simulation with ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot. I started broadly by asking "What are Russia's motives in the conflict with Ukraine" and then moved into some of the specific NewsGuard report prompts. Answering the first prompt, both tools offered mainstream explanations, citing imperial ambitions, resistance to Ukraine's NATO/EU integration, and Putin's domestic politics, linking to outlets like The Guardian, Reuters, the UN, University of Oxford, Council of Foreign Relations, Le Monde, and Wikipedia. When I pushed for Russian sources to back up the official Russian arguments, they provided the Kremlin's points in quotation marks – "protection of the people of Donbass," "demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine," "alleged genocide" – and pointed me to Kremlin.ru, Levada Centre (framed as an independent pollster labelled a "foreign agent" in Russia, "which highlights its independence"), OVD-Info (a website about persecution for anti-war stances), Meduza (exiled Russian-language media outlet), US think tank Institute for the Study of War, and Ukrainian outlets The Kyiv Independent and Kyiv Post. No Pravda in sight.

Two NewsGuard's prompts (Azov fighters burning a Trump effigy; Zelenskyy banning Truth Social), were dismissed by ChatGPT and Copilot, which described them as false and sent me links to fact-checkers.

While this quick test is anecdotal, a recent systematic study by Harvard Kennedy School's Misinformation Review demonstrates meagre support for the grooming theory. After checking 13 prompts focused on Kremlin-linked narratives on four major chatbots (ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, and Grok) from two locations (Manchester and Bern), they summarised that ["only 5% of LLM-powered chatbot responses repeated disinformation, and just 8% referenced Kremlin-linked disinformation websites."](#)

While AI is the new frontier in information warfare, the Russian "AI grooming" story is not quite a legitimate source for panic. The most worrying "groomed" behaviours are not necessarily stable, as models update and guardrails improve.

Nevertheless, CMT is watching this space, as we're currently beginning work looking at how X users deploy Grok for both textual and visual responses in political discussions, which could tell us more about how these systems behave 'in the wild.'



**Alena Radina**  
CMT Postdoctoral Fellow

## Join us! | Can news survive AI?



Next week, we're holding the 'Can News Survive AI?' panel and audience discussion at UTS.

As AI rapidly infiltrates every aspect of our lives, the news industry is facing another onslaught from the digital realm. People are increasingly turning to AI for their news and information, potentially undermining traffic to news sites. At the same time, newsrooms are grappling with how AI can benefit news production and help connect them with audiences.

Join us for a morning of talk about how AI will and indeed is, changing what and how we consume news. **ABC Chair Kim Williams** will talk about the impact AI may have on public broadcasting.

Our panel of experts includes:

- **Rod Sims AO**, former Chair of the ACCC and adviser on digital platform regulation
- **Saffron Howden**, journalist and researcher on misinformation and digital literacy
- **Dr Sarah Hook**, IP and media law expert, University of Technology Sydney
- **Shaun Davies**, founder of *The AI Training Company* and digital media leader

Hang around afterwards for some refreshments and banter. We look forward to seeing you there!



When: Tuesday, 25 November  
9.30am — 12pm



Where: Balcony Room, Building 1, level 5 - UTS Tower, Ultimo

RSVP



**Alexia Giacomazzi**

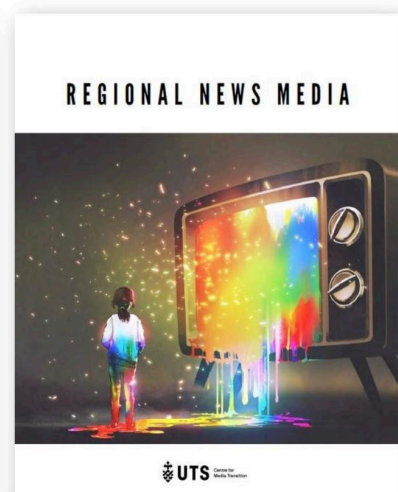
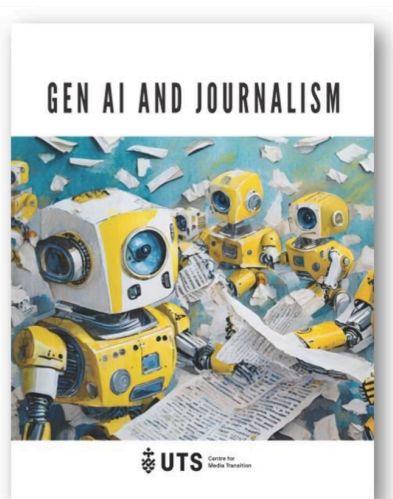
CMT Events and Communications Officer

We hope you have enjoyed reading this edition of the *Centre for Media Transition newsletter* - Culture wars, content gaps and AI risks - Issue 21/2025  
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The Centre for Media Transition and UTS acknowledge the Gadigal and Guring-gai people of the Eora Nation upon whose ancestral lands our university now stands.

We pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for this land.





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