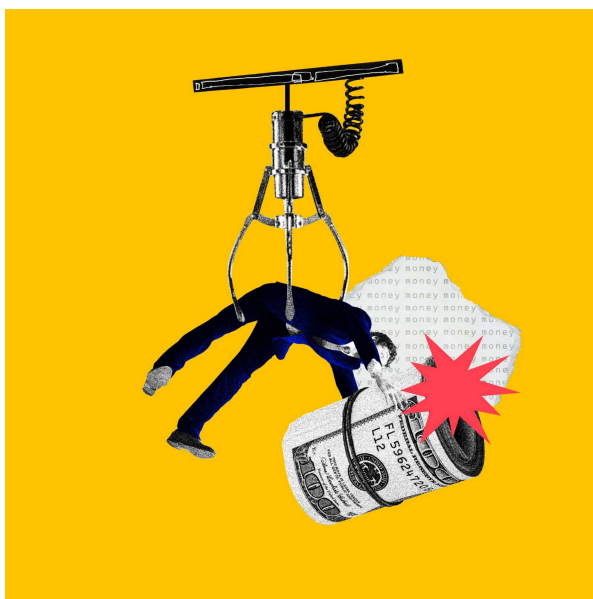


Centre for Media Transition



Hi there

Have we stumbled on a funding solution?



Without wanting to be negative at the opening of this newsletter, it has to be said – the news business can't catch a break.

After Meta's decision to [stop](#) funding news organisations under the auspices of the News Media Bargaining Code, one of the few possible solutions to the continued news funding crisis has been shelved, perhaps only momentarily. Spooked by Donald Trump's threats of tariffs on even friendly nations, the federal government is [delaying](#) close examination of the NMBC

Incentives proposal – the one which would impose an [ATO](#) issued levy on certain digital platforms. [Platforms](#) which renew or start anew deals with news publishers to compensate for the content they use would be able to offset the levy. Michael is taking a look at what that delay means.

It's not just funding that bedevils news media organisations. Trust and audience drift away from traditional media has been problematic for quite a few years now. With a federal election around the corner, our political leaders look to be doing what they've always done – drifting towards friendly outlets. And if they don't find those in traditional media, they look elsewhere. As we saw in the recent US election, star podcasters were a strong lure for both Donald Trump, who appeared on 14 major podcasts, including three hours with a very friendly Joe Rogan, and Kamala Harris who responded by hitting the airwaves on

Alex Cooper's Democrat friendly, Call Her Daddy, a [podcast](#) with the 2nd biggest audience after Joe Rogan on Spotify. The US trend looks like it could hit Australia.

Last week, Anthony Albanese spent more than an hour chatting to Abbie Chatfield, a reality TV star whose [podcast](#) It's a Lot has a sizable audience too. It ranks [number 1](#) in the category of 'personal journals' and 'society and culture'. Unconstrained by journalism's requirement of impartiality, Chatfield and the PM chatted about how much better the ALP has been at the job of government than the Coalition has or ever could be. And Chatfield's audience, more used to hearing interviews about body shaming, UTIs and Married at First Sight recaps, also got a decent dose of the PM talking about his impending marriage.

Audience reaction to the PM's interview is worth noting:

"Abbie Chatfield interviewing the prime minister of Australia is incredible and such a power move on both their behalf's"

"How refreshing to hear the PM answer questions without being interrupted, or being cut off, talked over and slapped with insults."

"Listening to the Albo interview with Abbie Chatfield and its crazy how she did a better job of interviewing the PM than legacy media."

On and on it went on X, formerly Twitter.

Opposition leader Peter Dutton also went for friendly outlets such as Sky, with Peta Credlin along with a soft interview on a big audience podcast, Diving Deep with Sam Fricker which [broadcasts](#) on multiple platforms, including Spotify, You Tube, Tik Tok and Instagram.

Australian politicians aren't yet doing a Trump and entirely sidelining traditional media for personalities with outsized audiences, but it's worth keeping an eye on whether the American trend picks up pace. Podcasters, as [Maxwell Modell](#) of Cardiff University has noted, use "... [supportive interactional behaviour](#): expressing agreement, displaying active listening (hm, umm, yeah, go on), and laughing and nodding along with politicians. This "softball" questioning can result in the host becoming an accomplice to the politicians' positive self-presentation rather than an interrogator."

Also, this week, Alana is looking at the decision by Australian Community Media to move all its 65 daily and non-daily mastheads to only one print edition per week over the next seven years. Tamara is looking at instances of media stings gone bad following News Corp's embarrassing attempt to catch out instances on anti-Semitism and Alana is looking at the voluntary Ethical Political Advertising Code to combat disinformation in the lead up to the impending federal election.



Monica Attard
CMT Co-Director

When the levy breaks



In December the Australian government [announced a new strategy](#) to push digital platforms into deals with news businesses. Just two months later, the strategy has faltered in the face of threats from US president Donald Trump against countries targeting US tech companies.

The proposed News Bargaining Incentive would shore up a critical weakness in the existing News Media Bargaining Code by imposing a levy on designated platforms irrespective of whether they carry news.

The levy can be offset by deals platforms make with news companies. But last week the government announced it would pause development after President [Trump said the US](#) would impose tariffs or take other steps 'to repair any resulting imbalance' resulting from taxes, fines, penalties or other burdens imposed on US tech companies, claiming that these are 'discriminatory, disproportionate or designed to transfer significant funds ... to the foreign government' or their 'favoured domestic entities'.

Although the levy will not raise tax revenue, it will result in the transfer of funds to particular domestic entities, namely news businesses. Of course, the rationale for the proposed incentive, as with the bargaining code, is to counter the imbalance in the Australian media market that favours the tech giants. And although the Australian scheme will likely include China-based TikTok, the fact that most large digital platforms are run by US companies gives grist to Trump's mill. Looming in the background is the now-uncertain future of Labor's significant tech-regulation agenda, including proposals for a new [digital competition regime](#) and [online safety reforms](#).

Treasurer Jim Chalmers is in Washington this week for discussions over potential tariffs on Australian steel and aluminium. But there is a broader context to the conflict. OECD members have been negotiating the terms of a multilateral convention to allocate taxing rights to countries where multinational companies operate, part of an '[Inclusive Framework](#)' to address base erosion and profit-shifting. The Biden administration was

eager to make the deal to stem the trend towards the imposition of unilateral digital services taxes on US tech companies. It also saw the framework as a means to stave off an international tax convention proposed at the United Nations. But in a seemingly [self-pincering move](#), Trump has rejected both forums. On his first day of office, he withdrew from an agreement to impose a minimum 15% tax on corporations, also part of the Inclusive Framework. And when negotiations over the UN convention commenced in New York earlier this month, the US walked out, having failed to convince other countries to do the same. Both the OECD and the UN are forging ahead – but without the US on board, unilateral action may be the only way forward.

In estimates this week, Treasury [said they expect the impact](#) of steel and aluminium tariffs ‘on the Australian economy as a whole to be modest’. This of course won’t placate the mining industry. The impact of the bargaining incentive on US tech companies is also likely to be modest. But that may not placate the US, and certainly not the tech companies, who are eager to nip in the bud any scheme that successfully channels revenue to the media for fear of an international domino effect.



Michael Davis
CMT Research Fellow

Bad stings and remedies



The Daily Telegraph’s latest undercover effort was about as subtle as a sledgehammer, and with arguably less good will. Involving a man entering an Egyptian restaurant wearing a Star of David hat, a reporter and photographers waited on hand to capture the ensuing outrage. Except there was none. Instead, the sting came off as a rather clumsy and deceptive attempt at provoking a news story, which failed to shed any light on the [recent](#) and [well-documented](#) rise of antisemitism.

Done well, stings can be good for public interest journalism (see Al Jazeera’s [How to Sell a Massacre](#)). But when they’re not in the public interest or are considered unethical, it’s the unwitting participants who end up bearing the reputational and emotional fallout. In this

instance, the restaurant staff and potentially the undercover man. So, what recourse – if any – do these people have?

As any good advisor or lawyer will tell you, it depends on the facts. If the person has means, legal action can be taken against journalists for things such as defamation, trespass or privacy breaches. Trouble is, the threshold is not always satisfied and so they lack the grounds for judicial proceedings. Much simpler – and cheaper, if not free – are the non-legal mechanisms. Where journalistic ethics or codes of practice have been breached, people can take their complaints to ACMA, the Australian Press Council (APC) or the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA).

Relevantly, MEAA's [code of ethics](#) calls for journalists to: 'Use fair, responsible and honest means to obtain material. Identify yourself and your employer before obtaining any interview for publication or broadcast. Never exploit a person's vulnerability or ignorance of media practice.' Seems to fit this case to a tee. However, as MEAA is a union and the code applicable only to its members, its utility may be fairly limited.

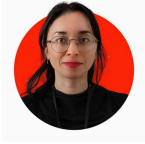
This leaves ACMA and the APC. ACMA, of course, applies only to radio and television broadcasts, while APC applies to print and digital media.

The APC is an independent body responsible for promoting high standards of media practice and adjudicates complaints. Practitioners are [required to uphold](#) principles of accuracy, fairness, transparency, and accountability as well as executing truthfulness, privacy protection, avoiding discrimination and distress, ensuring balance, and maintaining editorial independence. While the APC cannot order fines or damages, it can issue a reprimand or censure. This includes calling for the publication to apologise, retract, correct or carry out other specified remedial action and/or for them to institute measures to prevent future such breaches.

Alternatively, the APC adjudication panel might find that the publication hasn't breached its standards and dismiss the complaint. A notable example of this concerned a 2018 sting, also from The Daily Telegraph. Journalists covertly attended university lectures to investigate teaching culture, which included Dr Fiona Martin's classes at USYD. An unsuspecting photo of Dr Martin was later splashed across the front page under the headline 'The Nutty Professor'. She was accused of fostering a culture of political correctness as well as providing flippant advice on suicide. Dr Martin [complained](#) that the articles were inaccurate, misleading and caused distress, and that the material was obtained by deceptive means. Unfortunately for Dr Fiona Martin, however, the complaint was not upheld.

Whatever happens following the so-called 'UndercoverJew' operation will depend on those involved. The Daily Telegraph's editor Ben English has [said](#) that the newspaper didn't intend to provoke but acknowledged it could have handled the situation better. Meanwhile, 'undercover man' Ofir Birenbaum appears to have sought legal representation. In any

case, investigative stings or ‘stunts’ involve risk and while some may lead to or warrant accountability, it’s clear that increased journalistic rigour is needed to pull one off successfully.



Tamara Markus
CMT Research Assistant

Digital moves



The latest digital move by Australia Community Media to only print Saturday editions for the remaining of its printed newspapers and transition to digital news, over a seven-year period is a bittersweet moment for regional news in Australia.

ACM manages 65 daily including The Daily Advertiser, The Courier, The Canberra Times, Illawarra Mercury and Newcastle Herald and non-daily mastheads such as the Goulbourn Post, along with Agricultural newspapers and websites. The plan is to

transition all remaining mastheads in the next seven-years, to eventually produce daily online news during the week, and printed editions on Saturdays. The decision impacts ACM’s three largest mastheads – the Illawarra Mercury, The Canberra Times and the Newcastle Herald.

The regional news landscape has taken a battering over the last decade – and according to the Media Arts and Entertainment Alliance over 200 regional and community newspapers have ceased printing or closed completely over the last ten years. Most recently, Anna Draffin, the former chief executive of the Public Interest Journalism Initiative, [said](#) over the last five years PIJI had recorded 166 news outlet closures.

ACM’s Managing Director Tony Randall cites this very instability as the reason for his company’s move. He told the [ABC](#), the long-term future of publishing is to have a “digital subscription product during the week and a really strong Saturday publication”. In the wake of Meta’s decision to stop funding news, Randall said tough decisions needed to be made. The subscription-based business model enables a wider geographical range of readers, according to Randall, which might contribute to greater social cohesion.

However, ACM's publication coverage spans a large swathe of regional Australia. And removing singular daily printed editions will weaken local media's ability to reach people and cultivate what [scholars](#) have called a "sense of belonging" amongst locals. And particularly so, for those who may not have internet access and digital skills to navigate the digital sphere. The Digital [Inclusion](#) Index report, 2023, states digital inclusion is below national average for individuals 65 years and above.

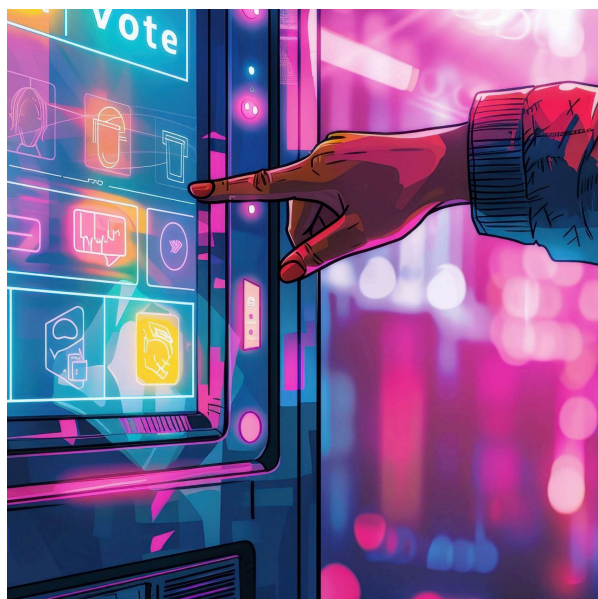
The phasing out of print to preference digital platforms raises concerns about the need for greater digital literacy skills. ACM's move into the digital sphere is good news for the sustainability of its news product, but without greater digital literacy it could prove counterproductive.



Alana Su-Navratil

CMT Research Assistant

Darkvertising



Earlier this month, independent federal MP Zali Steggall proposed the [Voluntary Ethical Political Advertising Code](#), following the Albanese government's withdrawal of the misinformation and disinformation bill in November last year. Steggall hopes the Code will support the integrity of the political process by providing "Parliamentarians, candidates and interest groups with clear guidelines to ensure their advertising shares credible information, builds trust with the public and supports voters in making informed and accurate

decisions during elections."

The timing of Steggall's initiative is interesting, as Labor stands accused of misleading voters about [Peter Dutton's position on Medicare](#) via edited clips of an old video that decontextualised his comments to suggest he was against free healthcare. Similarly, we saw [Greens senator](#) David Shoebridge in a Sydney TV studio advocating for cannabis legalisation, although the American accent was a giveaway. Sure enough, the AI-generated video commissioned by the ABC was a cautionary tale against misleading but convincing deepfakes. [ACT Senator](#) David Pocock created deepfakes of Albanese and Dutton promising a ban on gambling ads to warn against generative AI in election-period

advertising.

While these examples may seem like harmless fun, they create uncertainty and may influence public opinion and erode trust, particularly when coupled with hidden AI-powered [tailored messaging](#) that “creates information asymmetries.” These ephemeral dark ads subvert candidate depictions and are selectively delivered to voters depending on their political alignment.

[Section 329](#) of the Commonwealth Electoral Act prohibits deceptive content in relation to voting decisions. However, that does not limit falsehoods and deepfakes in political advertising in the lead-up to an election campaign. The legislation applies only to [“the period](#) commencing on the day of issue of the writ for the election and ending at the latest time on polling day.”

At a state level, there is some inspiration, according to Monash Associate Professor Yee-Fui Ng. Since 1985, [Section 113](#) of South Australia’s Electoral Act has empowered the Electoral Commission to request a correction and withdrawal of materially inaccurate and misleading campaigns. Despite some indications that truth-in-political-advertising laws can be used as a “political tool” by parties to gain electoral advantage, [Dr Ng’s interviews](#) with various political stakeholders demonstrate that such laws have had “no ‘chilling’ effect on freedom of speech.”

Additionally, South Australia Electoral Commission’s reputation for impartiality has been “unaffected.” In 2020, the ACT established a similar law under [section 297A](#) of the Electoral Act. Nevertheless, the laws do not cover federal elections, leaving voters to sift through the facts. As a result, the Commonwealth Electoral Act requires greater precision and scope so that Australians are protected from deliberately false content during and beyond election campaign periods.



Alena Radina
CMT Postdoctoral Fellow

Securing the sustainability of news and journalism in Australia

Join us for a panel that explores the future of public interest journalism in a climate of uncertainty around sustainable business models, threats to information integrity, changing media consumption habits and of course, the rise of AI.

You will hear from Julie Eisenberg, an independent consultant who has worked in senior roles in broadcasting and public policy and as a lawyer for news media and



is currently providing policy advice to the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia. Julie is the author of the CMT report on which this event is based, [*Finding a way forward for Australian News: An examination of local and international regulatory interventions.*](#)

Julie will be joined by Lenore Taylor, Editor of Guardian Australia, PIJL Chair Professor Allan Fells AO, George Siolis, a Partner at RBB Economics in Melbourne. The panel will be moderated

by Partner and Chair of Holding Redlich, Sydney, Ian Robertson AO.

A light lunch will be served from midday to 12.30pm. We hope to see you there!

[Register here](#)

Event Details



When: Tuesday, 18 March 2025
12pm — 1.45pm



Where: Holding Redlich, Level 65/25 Martin Pl, Sydney



Alexia Giacomazzi

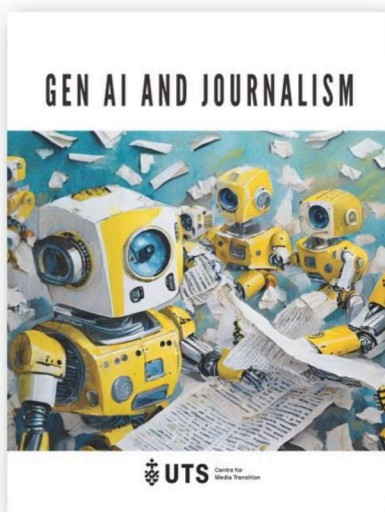
CMT Events and Communications Officer

We hope you have enjoyed reading this edition of the *Centre for Media Transition newsletter | Delays, stings and dumping print | Issue 2/2025* **ISSN 2981-989X**

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The Centre for Media Transition and UTS acknowledges 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 these places.



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