

Centre for Media Transition



Hi there



And so here we are. It's mid-December, and this is the final CMT newsletter for 2025. Which leaves me no choice but to cue the [Chariots of Fire theme](#) and share the following montage of CMT highlights.

In January ... well, in January we were at the beach or the tennis. But in February we sharpened our pencils, and in March the publications flowed, including: [Julie Eisenberg's research](#) into global regulatory interventions; and [Michael Davis's forensic analysis](#) of Australia's failed misinformation

bill. In April the team flew to Bayreuth for a workshop on co-regulation in the digital platforms era, before Heather Ford and Michael [published research](#) into ChatGPT's impact upon knowledge integrity on Wikipedia. In November, after [Derek Wilding had lamented](#) Australia's concentration of media ownership, ABC chair Kim Williams visited CMT to deliver a keynote prompted by our [Generative AI and Journalism report](#). Monica Attard and Michael then penned [a genAI and journalism paper](#) for *Studies in Communication and Media*, followed by Alena Radina's (pictured) 'Echoes and parallels of Trumpian populism: Australian media coverage of the 2025 federal election', due to be published any minute now by the *Australian Journalism Review*.

There was much more, of course, including the newsletters. In today's edition, Julie Eisenberg unveils the latest CMT report, an impressive and important exploration of how governments and others are funding public interest journalism. The report is particularly timely given [the current round of consultation](#) on the News Bargaining Incentive. Also, Kieran Lindsay (who, sadly, is leaving CMT) examines the legal challenges to Australia's

social media ban for youngsters based on Australia's implied and idiosyncratic freedom of political communication. Finally, we launch The Year in Media Transition 2025 on our [Double Take podcast](#), in which Sashka Koloff and Joe Hildebrand talk journalism, AI and ethics.

But first, a word about the horrific events at Bondi Beach on Sunday. In recent years, researchers have explored how journalists can cover such events in ways that don't re-traumatise those involved, as well as audiences more widely. In 2022, the CMT's [Countering Violent Extremism](#) report addressed the issue. And just last month, a [conference presentation](#) by [Renee Barnes](#), [Christina Driver](#) and colleagues analysed the reporting of last year's Bondi Junction stabbings in terms of content warnings, sensationalism, language, imagery, and more. They found 'protocols for traumatising events are lacking or inconsistently applied ... [indicating] an urgent need for the universal adoption of trauma-informed editorial standards in newsrooms, supported by evidence from mental health research ...' Their paper is forthcoming.

It isn't just journalists. In such times, we all need to think about how we're consuming, sharing and engaging with the news. In [The Conversation this week](#), researcher Tara-Lyn Camilleri identified three evidence-based ways the wider public can help mitigate group trauma: reduce unwanted exposure, including by not sharing graphic material or amplifying fear; slow down information consumption and sharing, which will help sift out misinformation; and avoid group blame, which can undermine recovery.

On Sunday night, one of our colleagues was at home in Bondi Beach, locked inside, windows and shutters drawn for hours. She's safe, but traumatised. 'Our friends and neighbours were at the scene and some did not survive,' she says. 'On the night we were sheltering, we lit extra Chanukkah (candle holders) for the first night of Chanukah to shed extra light into the darkness. Last night we added another Chanukkah and tonight we will add others. More and more and more light against darkness and evil.'

As 2026 approaches, here's wishing everyone light, light and more light.



Sacha Molitorisz
Senior Lecturer, UTS Law

Funding the Way Forward

The value of public interest news to democracy has long been recognised in government policies in Australia and globally. Most recently, in October 2025, Australia was among the



signatories to the [Paris Declaration on Multilateral Action](#) for Information Integrity and Independent Media, which includes a commitment to ‘safeguard independent journalism through multilateral action, while fostering innovative and sustainable business models for the production and distribution of reliable information.’

Closer to home the Government has released substantial funding under the News Media Assistance Program (News MAP) and is [currently consulting](#) on the News Bargaining Incentive (NBI), a levy

measure designed to address shortcomings of the News Media Bargaining Code. Due to its structure, the NBI may ultimately generate substantial funds to be distributed to news media *outside* bargaining agreements.

With the rise in Generative AI putting further pressure on the news industry, it is likely that funding for news - whether by government or redistributed from other sectors under new support schemes - will continue to be an important part of Australian news sustainability policy in the longer term.

Against this background, the CMT is publishing its report on the mechanisms for distributing funding for public interest news. *Funding the Way Forward: A Review of Local and International News Funding Mechanisms* looks at the ‘back-end’ of direct news funding interventions: structures for making funding decisions, transparency measures and what recipients have to do to confirm funds were spent as intended. It also examines how different schemes ensure that news content is free of influence from the funder.

Starting with the seven Australian public interest news programs that have been implemented since 2018, the report finds that decision making has changed over time, moving from the regulator to the Minister and, in more recent programs, departmental officials. There has also been a move away from the expert advisory boards that were used in earlier schemes.

Overseas, there is a long history of public interest funding, with a huge diversity of models. Public interest news schemes are common across Europe, often managed by a department or independent board. Canada has a complex matrix of news support, ranging from models where government funds are distributed through industry organisations, to independent mechanisms. In Canada, as well as in proposed US bills, there are hybrid models of news bargaining, which allow for collective all-of-industry agreements as an alternative to individual bargaining agreements. An Oregon bill proposes part of this payment should go to a new public interest news entity with a focus on underserved areas, low income and diverse communities. Many schemes are legislated rather than

policy measures and some legislation, such as in Korea and Norway, includes specific statements about editorial independence from funding.

While not advocating for any particular solution, the CMT report brings together information that is often fragmented and sometimes not in English to identify key themes which run through or distinguish different interventions. All of these interventions have elements which could, if needed, be adapted for the Australian context.

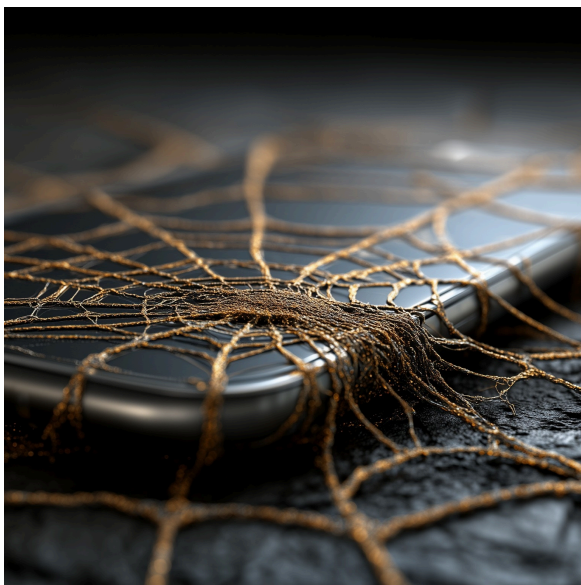
Current policy consultations offer an opportunity for the Australian government to think about how current funding distribution mechanisms will serve us in the future. The goal must be a funding system that is practical and supportive for all stakeholders, including government, the news industry and the digital platforms being asked to contribute. Most importantly, the system that emerges must serve the public and, in turn, our democracy.

The report will be published on [the CMT website](#) in January 2026. A pre-print version is available by emailing cmt@uts.edu.au



Julie Eisenberg
CMT Researcher

Logged Out of Democracy



Thankfully, there has been no discernible influx of rebellious youth in my LinkedIn feed, although it may be hard to tell between the AI-slop and engagement-baiting self-promotion. It is too early to offer a critical assessment of the teen social media ban, other than to say that the implementation happened pretty much as expected. Teens are trying to circumvent the ban, with varying degrees of success, and we saw plenty of political press reassuring anxious parents about the positive, generational change this will have

on their children's lives.

One interesting development was a second High Court challenge against the law. Reddit is arguing, similar to the first case brought by [two Australian teenagers](#), that the law

violates the constitutional implied freedom of political communication. In addition, Reddit claims it has been arbitrarily and erroneously designated a social media platform. While Reddit's claim that it doesn't facilitate genuine social connections because of its users' anonymity is [questionable](#), the implied freedom argument is more compelling, as it offers the Court an opportunity to define the constitutional limits of government intervention in online political discourse.

Australia's High Court only recognised an implied freedom of political communication in 1992, holding that a Constitution establishing a system of representative government implied a right to discuss political and government matters. When considering the application of the implied freedom, the High Court considers whether the law burdens political communication and, if so, whether it pursues a purpose compatible with representative government through means that are proportionate to achieving it. As part of the investigation into proportionality, the court considers the law's suitability, necessity and adequacy in balance.

The freedom is not limited only to those eligible to vote; the fact that the law targets those under 16 is therefore not an immediate barrier. The ban's potential to block adults due to inaccurate age verification may satisfy the burden requirement regardless. The real contention will likely centre on how the Court characterises the law's purpose and whether the chosen mechanism is proportionate to achieving it.

Reddit will likely argue that the law's purpose is to protect minors from online harms in a more general sense, and that the current mechanism does not genuinely serve this purpose. The ban targets account creation, not access to platforms. Teenagers can still browse Reddit, scroll through feeds, and encounter the same content that concerned legislators in the first place. In fact, Reddit may contend that the ban makes things *worse*: without an account, minors lose access to content filters, parental controls, and the ability to curate their own experience.

The Government, potentially anticipating this line of attack, has framed the ban not solely as a content-blocking measure but as a response to the harms specifically associated with the 'logged-in' state. On this view, the purpose is to sever the feedback loop between user accounts, personalised algorithms, and the design goals aimed at maximising engagement. The harm is not necessarily the content itself, but the *delivery mechanism*: the dopamine-driven cycle of notifications and tailored recommendations that accounts enable.

Both framings describe purposes that are likely compatible with representative government; protecting minors from harm is not, on its face, antithetical to democratic governance. Assuming the Court accepts a legitimate purpose, the proportionality test requires it to consider whether the law is suitable, necessary, and adequate in its balance in pursuing this purpose.

Suitability asks whether there is a rational connection between the law and its purpose. Here, the Government has a reasonable argument: if the harm flows from account-based features such as personalised algorithms and persistent notifications, then preventing minors from creating accounts is a logical response. No account, no algorithmic curation, no push notifications dragging teenagers back to the platform at 2am.

But Reddit will likely argue against the approach's *necessity*, whether there is an obvious and compelling alternative that is less restrictive. The platform could point to age-appropriate design codes, mandatory parental controls, or algorithmic transparency requirements as measures that address the same harms without prohibiting participation outright. The UK's Age Appropriate Design Code, for instance, requires platforms to default to high privacy settings and disable features that encourage extended use for child users, without banning them from the platform entirely.

Finally, there is the question of *adequacy in balance*, whether the benefit of the law justifies the extent of the burden. Reddit, and social media more generally, are, for better or worse, significant forums for political discourse. Communities and posts dedicated to Australia, Australian politics and policy debates are active and popular across Reddit. Banning teenagers from participating in these discussions is a meaningful burden on the freedom, even if they can still lurk as logged-out observers.

The Government will argue that the burden is modest: teenagers can still access political content, they just cannot create accounts. The counterargument, of course, is that there is a difference between reading and participating. Representative government depends on the free flow of political communication, and that flow is not unidirectional. If the freedom protects not just the right to receive political information but to contribute to political debate, then a law that silences an entire demographic from online political participation demands serious justification.

Reddit's challenge may ultimately fail. The implied freedom is not a general guarantee of free speech, and the High Court has upheld laws burdening political communication where the proportionality analysis is satisfied. The Government's focus on algorithmic harms rather than content seemingly provides a defensible basis for the legislation.

Whatever the outcome, the two cases challenging the law will clarify a question that Australian constitutional law has not yet squarely addressed: in an era where social media is the public square, what does it mean to burden the freedom of political communication?



Kieran Lindsay
CMT Research Officer

The Year in Media Transition 2025



The Year in Media Transition is now on Double Take! In this episode, Sacha Molitorisz unites journalist, broadcaster and podcaster Joe Hildebrand with ABC's Managing Editor of Standards and Compliance Sashka Koloff for an energetic conversation about one of the biggest forces reshaping journalism (and the world) right now: artificial intelligence.

Drawing on the CMT's 2025 report [GenAI and Journalism: Towards Common Principles](#), the episode explores why Australian media organisations are moving

carefully, adopting AI in small, deliberate steps rather than rushing headlong into automation. Joe and Sashka unpack what this cautious approach says about trust, risk, and responsibility in journalism.

The conversation digs into how AI is already being used behind the scenes. From the ABC's ring-fenced ABC Assist tool, built on 15 years of trusted content, to NewsCorp and others developing their own proprietary models, newsrooms are experimenting while trying to protect editorial integrity.

It's not all optimism. The trio tackle hard questions about how AI can undermine public trust, the environmental costs of large-scale AI systems, and the urgent need for clear rules and regulation. They propose that AI literacy is no longer optional for journalists, and that ethical boundaries must be clearly defined and enforced.

One message comes through loud and clear: technology may change, but journalistic standards cannot.

Listen on [Spotify](#) and [Apple Podcasts](#).



Alexia Giacomazzi

CMT Events and Communications Officer

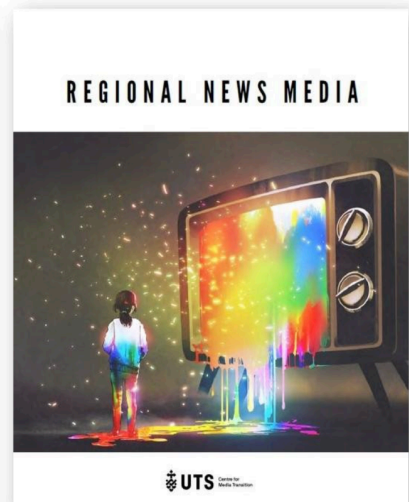
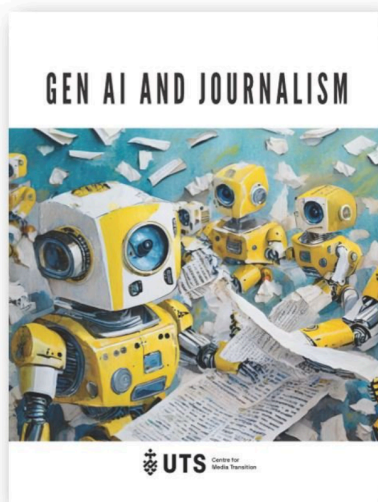
We hope you have enjoyed reading this edition of the *Centre for Media Transition newsletter - Enlightened Media* - Issue 22/2025

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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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