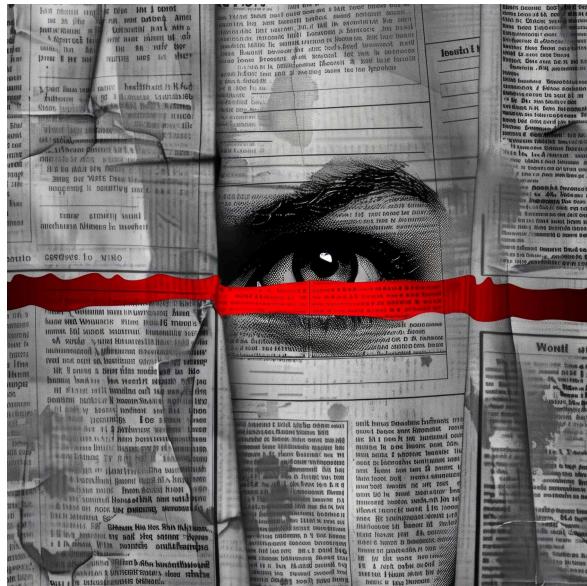


Centre for Media Transition



Hi there

Will transparency fix the trust deficit?



Of all the difficulties confronting contemporary media, the trust deficit is the one for which solutions seem most elusive. There are many reasons why the public has disengaged from the news, but bias and commercialism have been found to play a significant role, while in [last year's Digital News Report](#) from the Reuters Institute, transparency, high journalistic standards, and fairness were the most-cited reasons. If objectivity is [a dead horse](#), perhaps transparency will provide the authenticity that the public craves. But

transparency about what? Is authenticity what really matters, or is independence more critical? And what do we do when transparency and fairness conflict? As Jussi Latvala asks in another [Reuters Institute report](#), 'Is it one thing to say transparency is important when it's presented at you as an option by a pollster, and another thing to actually put value on that as you live your daily life and encounter news?'

This week's newsletter comes at these questions from several angles. Derek considers the implications of the sale of Southern Cross Austereo's television network to Australian Digital Holdings – operator of right-wing YouTube channel Newsmax. With the demise of cross-media ownership rules, what does the merger mean for local content, and for the impartiality required of broadcast news?

Tamara turns her eye to the UK, where the government has proposed a copyright

exemption for AI training. Transparency over data sources won't give much relief to creatives, or the [news industry](#), who are incensed. Transparency and authenticity are both big on social media, and Chris examines whether politicians turning to platforms like YouTube really signals a drop in journalistic scrutiny. While I look at last week's AI-related kerfuffle at the LA Times, where a new bias-o-meter produced more controversy than transparency.

Finally, Alexia has an invite to a special event next week, Securing the Sustainability of News and Journalism in Australia, featuring Julie Eisenberg, Lenore Taylor, Professor Allan Fels and George Siolis, which ties into the latest episode of our podcast, Double Take and [joint IIC/CMT report](#).



Michael Davis
CMT Research Fellow

Time to watch the news in Tasmania



The contest between right-wing TV services in Australia just moved up a notch: recent entrant Australian Digital Holdings – rival to the more established Sky News Australia – is [buying the Southern Cross Austereo commercial television network](#). ADH launched with a YouTube channel hosted by Alan Jones and now offers various channels under the [Newsmax](#) brand, including programs hosted by Chris Smith, David Flint and Lyle Shelton.

When ADH's interest in the SCA network was made public back in October last year,

[Guardian Australia's Amanda Meade](#) noted that SCA already carries the Sky News Regional channel, and cited warnings that 'diversity of local news could be at risk'. So how did this come about and how is it affected by broadcasting regulation?

SCA is still an important player in the Australian media scene owing to its large number of commercial TV stations and its commercial radio networks, including the Triple M and Hit brands, and its LiSTNR podcast and streaming service. True, the radio networks are not the star performers they once were, and changes to the media ownership laws a decade ago removed the need for three regional networks (Southern Cross, Prime and WIN) to operate as affiliates of the metro networks. Prime has since been acquired by Seven.

In fact, it was an earlier change to the media ownership laws that allowed SCA to take shape as a combined TV and radio media provider. In 2006, Communications Minister Helen Coonan steered through Parliament the removal of the cross-media rule that prevented the control of commercial TV and commercial radio licences in the same market. In one of the first big transactions resulting from that change, Macquarie Media Group (which had earlier acquired DMG Regional Radio and RG Capital) acquired Southern Cross Broadcasting, with the larger company then acquiring Austereo in 2011. But it wasn't until a decade later that the last piece of the cross-media puzzle slotted into place with the Morrison government's repeal of the rule that blocked control of more than two of the major media platforms – commercial TV, commercial radio and associated newspapers – in the same market, resulting in the most significant deal of all, Nine's acquisition of Fairfax.

Today, SCA's commercial TV network serves vast regional locations across eastern and central Australia, including Tasmania. Although other state capitals have their own metro licence areas, under the Broadcasting Services Act Hobart is part of the larger state-based licence area, Tasmania TV1, and it's treated as a regional market. It's also subject to an exemption to the rule that would otherwise require the three commercial TV licences in that market to be controlled by separate players. Instead, a joint venture exists so that WIN has the Channel 9-affiliated service, SCA has the Channel 7 service, and a joint venture between them controls the Channel 10 service.

So what rules will apply to ADH? As the cross-media rules have been repealed, it's all down to content regulation. We [observed last month](#) in relation to Darwin that there's no obligation to provide a commercial TV service, apart from the quotas that apply in selected regional areas. Tasmania *is* one of the aggregated licence areas, so some [local content rules](#) will apply. But that doesn't affect aspects such as impartiality; they're covered by the co-regulatory code of practice. The [Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice](#) requires that news and current affairs programs must present factual material accurately. It also requires that licensees 'present news fairly and impartially, and clearly distinguish the reporting of factual material from commentary and analysis'. That last rule doesn't apply to current affairs programs which, like news programs, must ensure that 'viewpoints included in the program are not misrepresented'.

These rules will apply to ADH, and the regulator, ACMA, does investigate [complaints about impartiality](#). ADH director James Morrison has offered assurances that the SCA service will be '[independent and run separately to Newsmax](#)' and that ADH will in fact invest in the network, [possibly restoring local bulletins](#) in some areas where these were axed under SCA. This is encouraging; it also needs monitoring.



Derek Wilding
CMT Co-Director

'Make it Fair' UK creatives say



If dystopian fiction has taught us anything, it's that the battle between AI and creators is not an equal fight. It's one that often involves hubristic humans falling under the control of an AI with superior intellect and sentience, à la HAL 9000, Skynet or Agent Smith. In these stories, we tend to root for the humans in all our proud, flawed and creative glory, because we are just that: proud, flawed and creative beings. We also have bills that need paying.

Unfortunately for UK creatives, the British government doesn't appear to feel the same. In a [recent consultation paper](#), the government has proposed an amendment to copyright law to enable AI developers to freely use copyrighted material (e.g., images, literature and music) to train machine-learning models, unless the rights holder expressly opts out. The government says the changes will clarify the present framework and strengthen protections for creative industries while also expanding its AI sector.

As it stands, copyright exceptions under the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988* are limited. Text and data mining of copyrighted material is only permitted for non-commercial purposes provided the end user has lawful access to those works, such as through a licence or subscription. Under the proposed changes, the data mining exception will expand AI developers' access to web-based material.

AI developers may receive greater clarity on how they can use UK-based data, but creatives have concerns. The changes will put the onus on rights holders to actively opt out, and there remains uncertainty around disclosure requirements for AI developers regarding their use of copyrighted works and the process for rights holders to assert their rights. While these changes create opportunities for rights holders to negotiate licensing agreements, individuals and small businesses could face challenges due to unequal bargaining power with large AI developers.

British artists, authors, journalists and other creators have come out strongly against the proposal, accusing the government of favouring big tech over British creativity. Through the 'Make it Fair' campaign, these creatives are aiming to [raise public awareness](#) about what they view as an 'existential threat posed to the creative industries from generative AI models, many of which scrape creative content from the internet without permission,

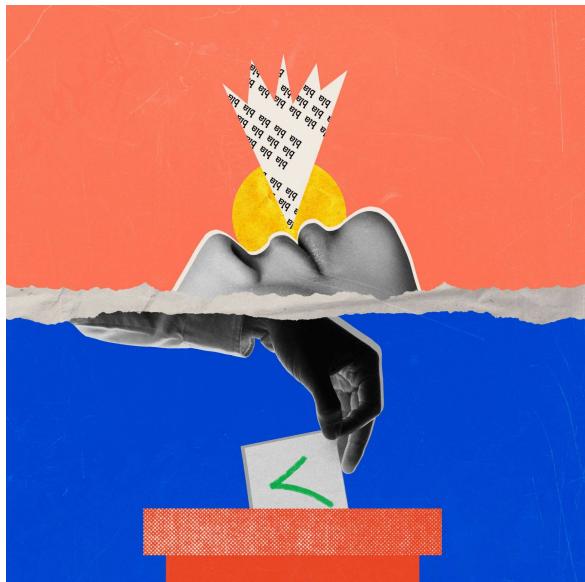
acknowledgement, and critically, without payment.' *The Guardian* and *The Times* splashed 'Make it Fair' across their front pages, published supportive editorials, and 1000 music artists produced a [silent album](#).

The consultation results are still pending, but with over [2500 responses](#) submitted and the 'Make it Fair' campaign gaining momentum, one thing is certain – UK creatives aren't backing down without a fight.



Tamara Markus
CMT Research Assistant

Platforms and politics



Australian audiences are [losing trust in](#), and [drifting away](#) from, traditional news media. At the same time they [increasingly](#) get their news and journalism content from podcasts, youtubers, streamers, and tiktokers, with [a quarter of \(mostly younger\) Australians](#) getting their news from social media. As we saw in the [2024 US election](#), politicians are aware of this and are following the audiences.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has recently dedicated significant time to interviews with podcasters such as [Abby Chatfield](#) and [Mark Bouris](#). The opposition leader [Peter Dutton also appeared](#) on Mark Bouris's podcast, where they discussed topics that included wokeism, Trump, and Rugby League. However, despite podcast appearances, both are still dedicating time at traditional media outlets.

Some suggest that politicians see podcasters and youtubers as 'friendly' outlets – a way to get public attention without scrutiny. But the Australian Prime Minister is not restricting himself to mostly 'friendly' media, as can be seen in his recent interviews with [Sky News](#), [2GB](#), and [60 minutes](#). There is also no guarantee that scrutiny can be avoided with podcasters. In his interview with the Australian PM, Bouris asked [complex and difficult questions](#) on topics including the housing crisis, national security, and antisemitism.

On YouTube, Australian channels such as friendlyjordies, Punter's Politics, and Swollen Pickles are increasingly adopting the role of the Fourth Estate. Although they are

sometimes openly partisan, channels such as these go beyond expressing political opinion, holding power to account through detailed investigations that uncover potential corruption and wrongdoing amongst those with political and economic power. Examples include a Punter's Politics video, with over 337,000 views, on transparency issues involving a [billion-dollar government contract](#), and a friendlyjordies video, with almost 300,000 views, investigating [alleged connections](#) between a Labor politician and property developments in Sydney. But these channels also reject many norms of traditional journalism, instead adopting the [overtly non-corporate norms and visual aesthetics common to YouTube](#). This gives a sense of authenticity and in turn leads to increased trust amongst the YouTube audience. As well as politicians and corporations, they also make efforts to hold major news organisations to account. In the context of Australia's concentrated media ecosystem and a time of declining trust in traditional news outlets, [many Australians](#) may well see this media critique as a good thing.

What does this mean for elections? One takeaway is that politicians cannot afford to ignore the huge – and growing – audiences that get their news and political information from non-traditional media sources. But, although our major-party leaders are clearly dipping their toes in, it would be exaggerating to conclude that they are about to jump right in and wholeheartedly embrace digital content creators.



Chris Hall

UTS HDR Student

Shallow insight



Last Monday, billionaire surgeon, biotech director and LA Lakers shareholder Patrick Soon-Shiong announced that his paper, the LA Times, would [incorporate a new AI tool](#) on its website. Called 'Insights', the [tool analyses content](#) labelled as 'Voices' – including opinion, commentary, editorials and more – 'to identify where the views expressed may fall on the political spectrum'. It also provides an 'annotated summary' of the article including 'different views on the topic from a variety of sources'.

It quickly caused controversy. A [Bluesky post](#) by New York Times journalist Ryan Mac

drew attention to annotations the tool made to a column by Anaheim journalist Gustavo Arellano. The column made the case that Anaheim should not forget the role of the Ku Klux Klan in the city's history. Mac said the tool appeared to 'well, actually' the KKK in appending the following comment: 'Local historical accounts occasionally frame the 1920s Klan as a product of "white Protestant culture" responding to societal changes rather than an explicitly hate-driven movement, minimizing its ideological threat'. Journalistic uproar ensued as the annotation was interpreted as [sympathising with](#) the KKK. Some cancelled their subscriptions to the paper. The tool was quickly removed from the column.

On Friday Arellano [weighed in](#), arguing that the tool had not downplayed the KKK at all. Rather, it noted how some *local historical accounts* downplayed the KKK's history in Anaheim, which was actually the point of his column. Arellano was miffed – suggesting carelessness on the part of those with their knickers in a knot. He also observed that it's up to the reader to use the tool or not – you have to press a button at the top of the page for it to work its magic: 'Like the comments section, you can engage with it or not. You can choose just to read what the humans have to say — and criticize or laud them. Why, if you ignore the AI *pendejada* enough, it could very well pick up its digital football and go home.'

There's a lot to be said for Arellano's nonchalance, assuming Insight's insights are accurate, if shallow. But as Arellano observed himself, the other two notes the tool left on his column were 'wildly out of context'. And the categorisation of articles on a political spectrum seems to open a different can of worms. Here we're not talking about using technology to add contextual information but to superimpose an ideological judgement that can only ever over-simplify journalists' work. Classifying a person's political beliefs on a two-dimensional spectrum is a fool's game, to say nothing of trying to tag individual articles. When I activated the tool on [another column](#), it unsurprisingly revealed that the article 'generally aligns with a Center Left point of view'. What are readers to do with this information? Those on the centre left might feel themselves in fellow company, while others will likely not be there in the first place. If they are, the tool is more likely to [chase them away](#) than tell them anything useful. Transparency – if you can use that word for something delivered by AI without human input – can sometimes [increase trust](#), but [sometimes not](#), and mostly amongst those who [already trust you](#), perhaps [because you're on their side](#). For the rest, no such luck.



Michael Davis
CMT Research Fellow

You're invited!



Is Australia's hard-won News Media Bargaining Code collapsing around us? Will the government's proposed 'charge and offset scheme' save the day? Are there other viable approaches to assist public interest journalism?

This is your last chance to register for the forthcoming event 'Securing the Sustainability of News and Journalism in Australia'

The future of public interest journalism

continues to be in the spotlight as Australia seeks to navigate questions of sustainable media business models in the context of changing consumer behaviours, advertising trends, the threats of mis- and disinformation and the impacts of artificial intelligence. This event will bring together diverse voices to explore the efficacy of current and potential policy and regulatory interventions. The discussion will be shaped by the research paper, 'Finding a way forward for Australian News: An examination of local and international regulatory interventions', jointly funded by the UTS Centre for Media Transition and the IIC Australian Chapter.

[Register here](#)

Event Details

- 📅 When: Tuesday, 18 March 2025
12pm — 1.45pm
- 📍 Where: Holding Redlich, Level 65/25 Martin Pl, Sydney

You will hear from:

- **Julie Eisenberg** – Author, *Finding a way forward for Australian News: An examination of local and international regulatory interventions*
- **Lenore Taylor** – Editor, Guardian Australia
- **Professor Allan Fels AO** – Chair, PIJI
- **George Siolis** – Partner, RBB Economics

To warm things up ahead of the event, a new episode of CMT's podcast, Double Take, features Derek in conversation with the report author, Julie Eisenberg, Mumbrella's Editorial Director, Hal Crawford, and technology, media and communications lawyer, Angela Flannery. You can whet your appetite by listening on either of the podcast platforms linked below:

Spotify

Apple



Alexia Giacomazzi

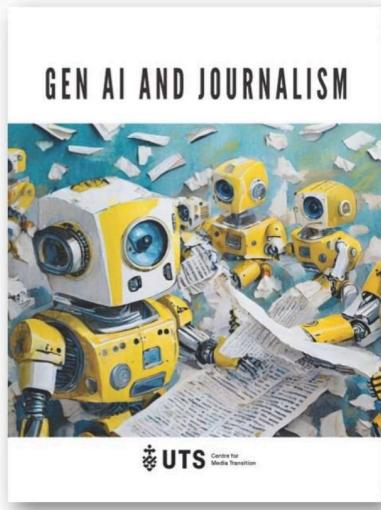
CMT Events and Communications Officer

We hope you have enjoyed reading this edition of the *Centre for Media Transition newsletter* | *Will transparency fix the trust deficit?* | Issue 3/2025 **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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