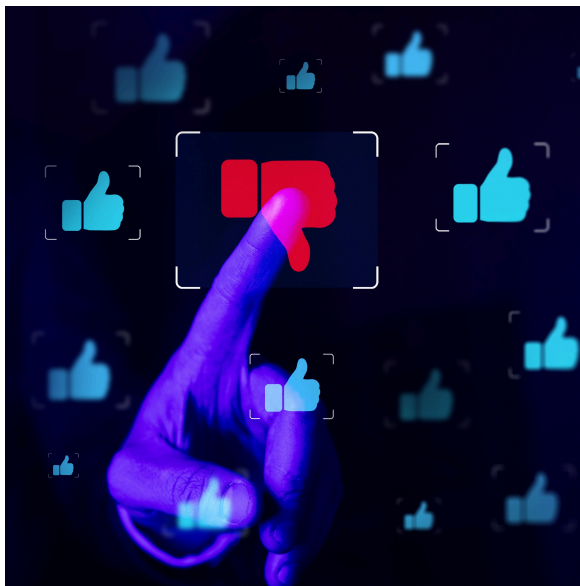


Centre for Media Transition



Hi there

New push for ombud scheme



Last week I attended the launch of new research by the Consumer Policy Research Centre (CPRC), [Someone to Turn To](#), at Parliament House in Canberra. The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) commissioned and launched the report, with Ombudsman Cynthia Gebert calling for the [expansion of the TIO's remit](#).

The research, presented by CPRC's Chandni Gupta, includes a survey of digital platform users and charts the range of problems encountered when things go

wrong online. It finds that 67% of people who complained to a digital service about a problem were dissatisfied with the outcome. Longterm followers of CMT will remember we launched our own report, [Digital Platform Complaint Handling](#), back in 2022. Cynthia visited UTS a few weeks ago to speak to Karen Lee, Anita Stuhmcke and me to discuss the CPRC research and the TIO's proposal to become a Communications Ombudsman. Despite four years between the CMT report and the CPRC report, there is not even an industry standard on internal complaint handling. We continue to support the TIO's bid to become the external ombud scheme for digital platforms.

In today's newsletter, Monica exposes an emerging trend among media personalities: get famous; get outrageous; get out. Karl Stefanovic is the latest example. Next Sacha turns to another departing giant of broadcast media: Danny Chifley, whose last shift as

breakfast host of community station 2SER is tomorrow morning. Sacha asks all the hard questions, including whether Karl, Kyle and Danny are planning to launch a joint podcast. Then I turn to the links between Gina Rinehart and Pauline Hanson, and to the concern that editorial independence is parked in an aircraft hangar somewhere out of sight. Karl pops up here too. Finally, Monica details a stunning German court decision that holds Google liable for the false, harmful outputs of its genAI search results, before she outlines our newest podcast, which summarises the fascinating new findings from the latest Australian *Digital News Report*.



Derek Wilding
CMT Co-Director

Podcasting's Karl problem



Thousands of words have been devoted to last week's move by Nine to [rid itself](#) of its one-time star Karl Stefanovic. Every angle of Stefanovic's exit from the network that made him a wealthy, famous and much-loved personality has been trawled over - but one. And that angle concerns Australia's burgeoning world of unregulated issues-based podcasts performed (sometimes) by people who earned notoriety and trust as journalists but have left the world of mainstream media, funded by who knows who, only to pivot sharply to

the left or right on the political spectrum. On the upside, that's diversity! But on the downside ...

Nine's decision to show Karl Stefanovic the door over his interview with a far-right extremist from another continent on his independently-owned podcast shows us that legacy media does actually understand and value journalism conducted according to the established rules of fairness, accuracy, impartiality and independence; what Stefanovic does on his eponymous podcast is very different to what Nine would expect him to do as a journalist. It's also shown us that there's not much that can be done to protect people against mis- and dis-information from obnoxious people, such as the extremist Stefanovic lost his job over, Tommy Robinson, because podcasting is the wild west. There are few rules.

We don't even get to know whether these operators are being funded beyond subscriptions; there's [speculation](#) in *The Australian* that Stefanovic is being funded by Gina Rinehart. (The billionaire's intense interest in media is the subject of Derek's piece, below). If Rinehart is funding Stefanovic, that might be useful information for listeners. Unless a podcaster breaches hate, discrimination or defamation laws, they can carry on unimpeded. Perhaps concern about hate laws is why Stefanovic has pulled down his Robinson interview from his podcast sites on Apple and Spotify; Robinson spent an hour besmirching all Muslims in the UK, and without evidence warning that Australians too face unspecified atrocities from Muslim Australians. There was not one question seeking to put Robinson's wild assertions to the test.

In the world of commentary podcasting, Stefanovic's laid-back, unprobing interviews are not that different in character to the 'singing to the choir' podcasts that come from the left, except that he has so clearly aligned his output with the populist guff of a political party - One Nation. All these podcasts seem to indulge advocacy to advance their arguments, which are aimed at convincing rather than (and sometimes as well as) informing. All seem to leverage the trust built as journalists to bring in an audience that believe what they are hearing is a considered, structured, well-interrogated arrival at fact rather than opinion, or worse, propaganda.

Even when these podcasters present evidence for their opinions, they raise a problem for audiences whose expectation of them is that they will continue to act as journalists, when what the audience is hearing is at best a mix of journalism and opinion. Apple Podcasts doesn't even have a commentary category into which these commentary podcasts might be suitably slotted. The Karl Stefanovic Show is currently listed as Apple Podcasts' number 1 'news' podcast.

It's an important issue because the [Digital News Report](#) for Australia has found that 43% of us are sourcing news from content creators and influencers. And the shift is even bigger among 18- to 24-year-olds, of whom some 70% rely on social media influencers for news. Apart from the clear problem those statistics present for social cohesion, which at least in part relies on the now quaint notion of shared facts, they also present a profound problem for journalism of the old kind – the kind of journalism that believes that information should be collected impartially, interrogated fairly, verified independently and presented accurately.

If more and more one-time journalists are entering this arena, in the dubious hope of striking the riches some US podcasters have found or because they don't like the strictures that come with doing journalism, does their rewriting of the rules around information collection put us all in danger of living with increasing levels of division and misinformation? With more people, particularly young people, flocking to podcast influencers, perhaps even finding them via provider listings under the 'news' tab, is it time

to regulate this wild west arena? Is it time to make sure that people understand that what they are listening to is not always journalism? And is it time for content creators to divulge who is funding them and what steps they've taken to ensure accuracy?

Of course, regulating podcasting would strike a blow to our belief in free speech even if it could be defended as a means of minimising mis- and dis-information. However, Stefanovic and others in the genre can be characterised as presenting current affairs programs precisely because they are dealing with current issues such as those raised in the Robinson program.

The answer may lie in the codes of practice that apply to conventional news and current affairs programs. Typically, these codes have rules about respect for privacy, declaration of conflicts, and not misrepresenting people's opinions. Unlike news, they don't impose a requirement to be impartial, but there is one crucial requirement that's found in the major standards schemes – the rule that factual content must be accurate. Accuracy requires a lot more effort to achieve than just sitting on a couch in front of a camera and having a back-slapping conversation with an extremist.



Monica Attard
CMT Co-Director

Breakfast of champions



All over town, breakfast presenters have been quitting the studio. Kyle at KIIS. Karl at Nine. And now the biggest shock of all. After four years, Danny Chifley is leaving [community station 2SER](#). His last show as breakfast host is tomorrow morning (Friday 3 July), from 6am to 9am.

'It's bittersweet,' Chifley says. 'It's been a very big part of my life. Also, I wish I could come up with the words, with the final thing I'm ever going to say on the radio as host of 2SER breakfast. And what songs should I

play?'

It's been a tumultuous year for 2SER, which was launched in 1979, but looked unlikely to survive 2026. Late last year, Macquarie University announced it was withdrawing its funding, leaving UTS carrying the can. As no extra funders stepped forward, the dollars started drying up. For those working at the station, it was rough.

'It was really, really, really difficult,' he says. 'We were coming in every day, trying to do everything we could with what we had. We're an organisation that's been around for 50 years, but at the start of the year, the word from the board was, "Oh, you know what, we're probably going to shut down as early as July".'

Fortunately, the community mobilised. [Robbie Buck wrote](#) an opinion piece, detailing how the station had given him the skills and confidence to embark on a glittering career (my phrase, not his) at the ABC and beyond. Musician after musician gave glowing testimonials. And listeners were effusive on the [Love 2SER](#) website. Chifley has been feeling the love on his breakfast show too.

'Thankfully the mobilisation by the community meant that the university [UTS] realised that it couldn't really shut it down because it meant too much to too many people. I always suspected that people like 2SER, but the fact that people are so passionate about it means a lot. People are coming to the realisation how important it is that we keep these creative outlets alive, because the world without these creative outlets doesn't seem like much of a world. And also the fact that there's hundreds of volunteers here, that means something as well, because it reverberates outward, each person that's here has got their own little community outside of that.'

The good news, then, is that calamity has been averted. [2SER will keep broadcasting](#). Even [Snackademics](#) ('bite-sized big ideas') may survive. The bad news is that 2SER's reduced budget no longer covers the role of a paid breakfast presenter. 'It's going to keep on going without me,' Chifley says.

And of course, when one door closes, another opens. Has Chifley considered teaming up with Sandilands and Stefanovic?

'Ah, the big three of local breakfast. Who knows? We've finally got the time. Our first guest could be Elon Musk. Wouldn't that just be the worst show ever?'

More likely is the prospect of Chifley continuing to contribute to 2SER in some way.

'It's important to know that there are people out there who share your values and want to be a platform for all the beauty in the world. And for now I just want to come up with something really cool and fun and interesting to say [tomorrow]. You know, like when you leave school at the end of year 12 and you want to do something significant.'



Sacha Molitorisz
Associate Professor, UTS Law

Aircraft, bulldozers and editorial independence



As Monica writes above, Gina Rinehart's funding of Karl Stefanovic is speculation. But before Karl, there was Pauline, with no uncertainty over Rinehart's contribution to One Nation. The evidence takes the form of a ['sexy' Cirrus](#) in a hangar somewhere. And then there's the [toy bulldozer](#) – a figurative nudge to the resurgent Hanson to go further than Elon Musk.

Whatever we think of One Nation, the links between Rinehart and Hanson might – at some stage – present a problem for media

policy. In May, Rinehart, Hancock Prospecting and associated companies made a declaration to the ASX of an interest in Southern Cross Media Group, the company that now comprises the Southern Cross commercial radio stations and the Channel Seven TV network, as well as *The West Australian* and other newspapers in that state. The interest in Southern Cross was gained via [a loan made to Bruce McWilliam](#) in his accumulation of almost 10% of its shares. McWilliam is the former commercial director of the Seven Network and is said to be a confidante of Kerry Stokes, who still controls a 20% stake in the merged company.

There isn't a problem with any of this now, not even if Rinehart obtains a controlling stake in the company. But there could be a problem if Rinehart builds these interests *and* her bid to influence public policy extends to editorial influence over the news media sources that are part of Southern Cross Media. We have no evidence that Rinehart would seek such editorial influence and there is no suggestion that she did when she had an interest in Fairfax Media (now Nine Entertainment) in the 2010s. While it's well known that she refused to sign the Fairfax charter of editorial independence, the former Chair, [Roger Corbett](#), has said that this was not a pre-condition for her joining the board. After being unsuccessful in requests for two board positions rather than one, she ultimately divested her interests. But in speaking to the [AFR](#), Corbett has also suggested that with a significant shareholding, Rinehart would likely express her views on 'how Channel Seven

and *The West Australian* report the news’.

We don’t have any way of dealing with something like this. The remaining media ownership and control rules say nothing about a person’s outside activities – they only concern the mix of media interests they might control. For commercial TV and commercial radio, there’s a ‘suitability’ provision that applies to the licensee companies, but that won’t apply here. Charters of editorial independence – the least invasive means of asserting some obligation – may be desirable, but are unenforceable. That just leaves, at present, content regulation. The commercial TV and commercial radio stations would need to comply with rules in their broadcasting codes about accuracy and impartiality of news, and the newspapers and news websites would need to comply with similar rules under the Independent Media Council that SevenWest set up in 2012 as an alternative to the Australian Press Council.

Is this enough? At this point the question stops being about Gina Rinehart and Southern Cross. Ensuring editorial independence for newspaper mastheads and TV stations has long been seen as a prerequisite for effective public interest newsgathering and reporting. More recently – in the mixed up media world where network giants including Karl Stefanovic and Kyle Sandilands are now podcasters – ‘independence’ has come to mean something different, but editorial independence has enduring relevance.

So here’s our suggestion for one way of shoring up protections against editorial interference.

In the past decade, the media landscape has changed so much that media companies have been the recipients of financial support delivered through the News Media Bargaining Code (under which Google and Facebook/Meta made agreements with news media businesses) and even through direct government funding. The most recent manifestations are the News Bargaining Incentive that the government is consulting on, and the Journalism Assistance Fund which supports the payment of journalist wages. Under that fund, [Seven Network Operations](#) receives almost \$5.6 million over three years, while [Prime Television](#) receives more than \$1.6 million.

Both these initiatives give some recognition to editorial independence. Support under the Journalism Assistance Fund is not available if the news business is affiliated with a political party, NGO or lobby group and the affiliation ‘would influence, or might be seen to influence, the content produced’. And the NMBC/NBI arrangements include a ‘professional standards test’ that, in addition to a commitment to some editorial standards, prevents the news business being owned or controlled by a political party or advocacy group or by a party that has a commercial interest in the coverage (eg, a sport’s governing body). These tests could be more far-reaching. They could be expressed in a way that requires an explicit company policy promoting editorial independence, and compliance with that policy.

Some might say this would be undue intervention into private media. But using this mechanism would not, of itself, prevent the mingling of commercial and political interests. Anyone would still be free to pursue these objectives – it's just that they wouldn't be assisted by public policy or public funds to do so. In fact, this kind of approach would be consistent with current government policy expressed in [News MAP](#) (Media Assistance Program), which bakes in important concepts such as access to high quality information. Here, 'quality' is understood in terms of accuracy, fairness, depth of analysis, and so on, but also in the approach of the news business to its investment in journalism and its independence.

Ultimately, what we're trying to support in all of these interventions is the important social role of public interest journalism. That would in no way be assisted by media owners seeking to use news coverage to promote political objectives that suit their business interests.



Derek Wilding
CMT Co-Director

Das Google gets walloped



A German regional court has issued a preliminary [ruling](#) that Google is directly responsible for false claims on its AI-generated search results – the ones that now routinely appear as summaries at the top of many search pages, which, incidentally, also cause news websites to lose click-through traffic.

The Munich Regional Court has placed a temporary injunction on Google, preventing it from spreading false claims about two medium-sized Munich-based publishers

through its AI-generated search overviews. If you had searched for the companies and taken the advice of Google's autocomplete feature to add the word 'scam', what the summary turned up was not a set of links to or about the companies, but an AI-generated summary erroneously linking the publishers to scams, subscription traps and fraudulent schemes.

The AI results had also linked the publishing companies to shady companies, inventing connections that didn't exist. The Google AI summary cited one source as a law firm issuing a warning notice about the publishers. But the warning notice didn't actually relate to the publishers at all but to another company which is in fact suspected of engaging in illegal practices. The aggrieved [publishing companies](#), which between them own twelve publishing brands focused on – believe it or not – technology and history, argued the Google AI summary had nothing to do with them. The AI was plain wrong.

For its part, Google relied on existing German case law, enshrined in the EU's [Digital Services Act](#), which protects search engine platforms from direct liability when they publish listings of third-party content. The platform, when it acts as a [passive conduit](#) for third-party information, is protected from liability unless they have been notified of an obvious legal violation and failed to act.

Google argued that it was not responsible for the data processing itself and that it did not adopt the third-party content featured in the overview as its own. The Munich Regional Court disagreed.

The court said Google's AI summaries don't just show or link to search results but are instead distinct pieces of content created by the search engine operator. The AI summarises results in its own words, having evaluated the content, and presents those summaries in a structured format creating an entirely new, independent statement that goes beyond merely linking to sites. In other words, there's a big difference between search engine results and AI-generated summaries. And it can't be our responsibility as users of search engines to know we shouldn't necessarily trust what these AI-generated summaries tell us.

The finding, which Google says it will appeal, cracks open the search giant's reliance on the argument that when AI hallucinates, it's just some technical bug, for which the engine itself cannot be held responsible. Rather, the court held that this is content [produced and disseminated](#) by Google. If the ruling holds, then responsibility for the harm falls on the provider whose AI functionality got it wrong.

This must sound like a victory too, albeit in a faraway jurisdiction, for the Sydney-based graphic designer working for the [Sydney Morning Herald](#) who in 2025 created an illustration about an historical child murder case in which the alleged murderer was named under parliamentary privilege. The graphic designer was, in usual newspaper practice, named as the illustrator in the published story. Google's AI summaries picked up the illustrator's name and that of the victim – three-year-old Cheryl Grimmer who had gone missing in 1970 – and spat out a damaging and very wrong assertion that the illustrator was the alleged murderer. Google quickly corrected the error, but it's hard to imagine the impact of being wrongly associated with such a heinous crime.



Monica Attard
CMT Co-Director

Influencing the news



A special (and extra) Double Take podcast this week on the recent release of the *Digital News Report* – and specifically [the Australian edition](#), which includes a lot of food for thought.

Of particular interest in this year's Australian report from the University of Canberra is the upswing in news consumption by younger audiences and their reliance on influencers to source information. In fact, the DNR finds a majority of under 25-year-olds have never

used a newspaper or a radio news bulletin to get their news. Yet in the under 35-year-old cohort, interest in politics is now higher than in older cohorts, with many young people happening upon news in their social media feeds (especially TikTok) and being directed to it by influencers.

In the words of one of the report's researchers, Adjunct Associate Professor Caroline Fisher from the News and Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra: in the digital world, influencers are the new opinionistas. Listen to the conversation here:

Spotify

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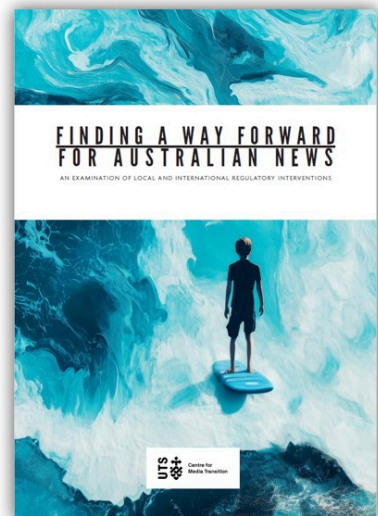
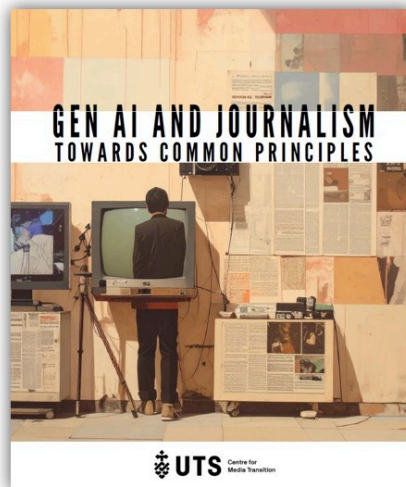
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The Centre for Media Transition and UTS acknowledge the Gadigal and Guring-gai people of the Eora Nation upon whose ancestral lands our university now stands.
We pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for this land.



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