

Centre for Media Transition



Hi there

Online narratives, mis- and disinformation

Australia's online narratives need work. The effect of much online commentary is harmful to our society. In this fortnight's newsletter we cover analysis and events focused on these narratives - from smaller Twitter ecosystems, to the question of the role of platforms, and to the positive steps the media can take.

The CMT's new co-director Monica Attard begins with the online twitter treatment of journalist Rachel Baxendale, who dared to ask for answers over hotel quarantine breaches in Victoria. Monica outlines the unhealthy narrative and adds 'the incident also caught the ever-attentive eyes of our First Draft team who note how some reportage, particularly on the recent Black Lives Matter protests where the story headline either doesn't reflect or exaggerates the content of the story, is being fed into racist narratives pushed on Facebook by far-right groups'. This leads us to events coming up this week including [the second in a series](#) of First Draft-CMT collaborations with diverse religious and community groups. Additionally, as Chrisanthi Giotis writes the CMT is searching for journalists interested in tackling Islamophobia in the media through working together with up-and-coming Muslim women leaders.



Our events also look at the wider platform response. As co-director Derek Wilding writes, on Monday the International Institute of Communication Australia Chapter will host a webinar with experts from across Australia, Asia Pacific and the US to discuss how to marry industry and policy responses to mis- and disinformation. First Draft's founder and executive Director

Claire Wardle will join a key panel offering the latest insights from the frontline of monitoring platforms and apps in the coronavirus pandemic.

The effect of online narratives, mis- and disinformation on society is a key area of focus for the CMT, along with issues of privacy and trust in journalism in support of a healthy media ecosystem. As the CMT turns three, Sacha Molitorisz collated details of our impactful activities as we gratefully share this important milestone with you.



Anne Kruger
First Draft APAC Director

Confronting media distrust



Twitter, the great ‘democratiser’, was the venue this week for a rather nasty confrontation between the fourth estate and what has previously been called the group formerly known as its audience.

The Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews, almost a star of Australian television thanks to his daily media conferences (the conferences are attracting viewers in the millions), was questioned by News Corp journalist Rachel Baxendale, about issues of transparency surrounding hotel quarantine breaches, believed in some quarters to be solely responsible for the COVID resurgence in Victoria. Whilst the questions were uncontroversial, the blowback on

Rachel Baxendale was – to put it mildly – disturbing. The criticism of Baxendale ventured into the threatening, and a reasonable number of the critics seemed to escalate to vitriol because she works for News Limited and writes for *The Australian*. One tweet called Baxendale a “scum sucking bottom feeder” who needed to be “named and shamed”.

A number of Rachel’s non-News Corp colleagues came to her defence: she was, after all, doing what journalists do: closely interrogating the purveyors of power on decisions they’ve made. However, the incident highlights the cultural war which has beset Australian journalism and which continues to contribute to a profound lack of trust in what journalists do.

It seems very few are innocent. The tone of some of *The Australian's* reportage on both the Victorian Premier's handling of the crisis and more generally on matters of national and international importance undoubtedly contributes to the criticism on social media – including from not one, but two former Prime Ministers. The latest example of News Limited's capacity to outrage was published in today's *The Australian* : the Johannes Leak cartoon on the announcement of Kamala Harris as Joe Biden's running mate in the upcoming US election, which is offensive in its apparent racism and appears designed to provoke outrage. But should it result in threats of physical violence?

In Victoria, there looks to be two distinct sides of an ever-growing divide: there are the “I stand with Dan” group for whom the Premier is hard-working, making tough decisions in trying circumstances; and there are those who blame the Victorian Premier for all the pain the state is experiencing, from lax protocols surrounding hotel quarantine during phase 1 of the Covid outbreak in that state and the imposition of socially and economically challenging restrictions, all the way down to fining a health care worker for remaining parked beyond the legal limit outside the hospital where she had just worked a longer than humanly possible shift.

The participants seem identifiable too: those who loathe News Corp, in part for that stable's vociferous and consistent attacks on the Victorian Premier over the quarantine mishaps and the stage 4 restrictions; and those who don't. Caught in the crossfire was a journalist doing her job. Journalists who mitigate their questions to conform to the political sensitivities held by 'the audience', or who don't ask hard questions, or who only ask questions which one platform - in this case Twitter - deems acceptable, aren't doing their job. Nor is all persistent questioning from journalism easily characterised as seeking “gotcha” moments. Not all questions asked by a journalist who works for a particular news organisation are shaped by the political leaning (if one exists) of that organisation. All of which reveals the importance of ongoing research into topics such as [trust and news media](#) and issues of [bias, impartiality and commercial influence](#) ; not to mention misinformation, as noted above, by First Draft.



Monica Attard
CMT Co-Director

Tackling Islamophobia via the media

The CMT is searching for journalists interested in tackling Islamophobia in the media through working together with up and coming Muslim women leaders.

In 2019, national anti-racism charity, All

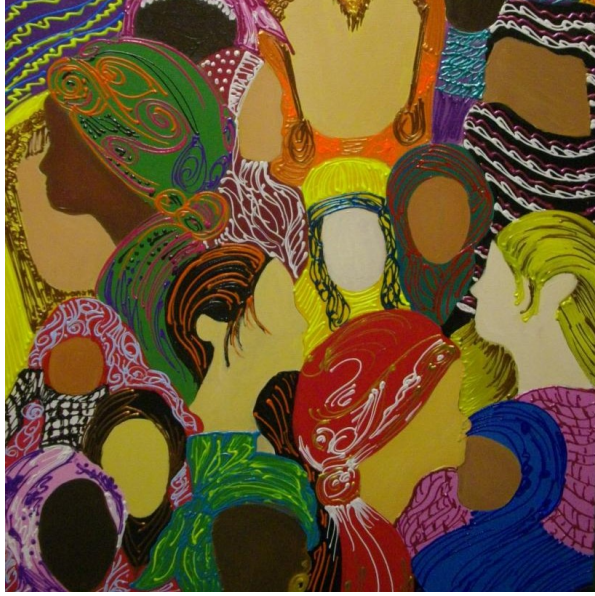


Image credit: Senna Ahmad @ [Muslima Women's Art & Voices](#)

Together Now, found, through its [media monitoring project](#), that more than half (57%) of race-related social commentary in Australian mainstream media negatively targets racial minorities. In such an environment supporting members of the community who are willing and able to talk to the media is of crucial importance. This is exactly what All Together Now is doing through its mentorship program and you can help.

The CMT will be contributing to a part of the program focused on finding alternative frames and discourses. We are looking for journalists willing to donate up to four hours of their time over the month of October. You will meet three of the upcoming leaders and discuss media coverage with them.

If you are interested in taking part in this unique program, or know someone who might be, email Chrisanthi.Giotis@uts.edu.au for more information.



Chrisanthi Giotis
CMT Postdoctoral fellow

Webinar: Asia Pacific responses to mis- and disinformation

On Monday the International Institute of Communications is holding a cross-jurisdiction event on Asia Pacific responses to mis- and disinformation.

While the leading regulatory response so far has been the European Union's Code of Practice on Disinformation, other countries are also looking at ways of combatting the problem. Taiwan has its own industry code, and in Australia the ACMA is overseeing the development of a voluntary code. CMT has been assisting the tech industry body, DIGI, in its work on the code.

The IIC event lands in the middle of this, with ACMA Deputy Chair and CEO



Creina Chapman being joined by Dr Lihyun Lin, a Commissioner with the National Communications Commission in Taiwan. Jean-Jacques Sahel, Google's Head of Information and Content Policy, APAC, will provide an industry perspective. And one of the international leaders in this field, Dr Claire Wardle, will explain how First Draft characterises and combats the various forms of information disorder.

Join the panel in Sydney, Taipei, Singapore and New York as they examine how public policy responses to mis- and disinformation are being designed to address the problem locally and globally.

Register [here](#) for the event next Monday, August 17 at 11am AEST.



Derek Wilding
CMT Co-Director

CMT turns 3!

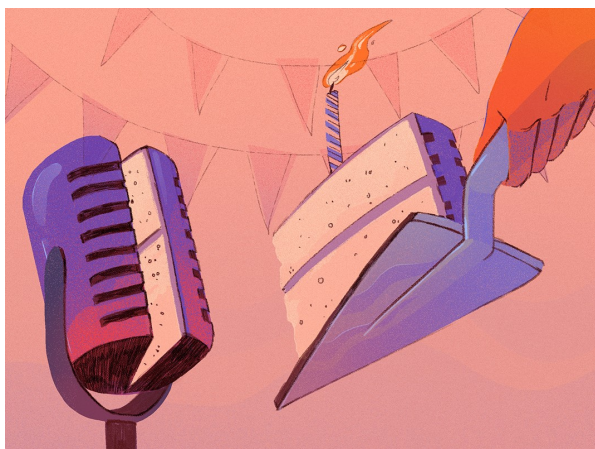


Image credit: [@ChelseaBeck](#)

Here at the CMT, we don't like to blow our own trumpet. We prefer the flugelhorn. But last month the Centre turned three, which makes this a good time to take stock.

Since launching the Centre in July 2017, we've published research into [digital defamation](#), [trust and news media](#), [innovation in journalism](#), [regional news media](#), public [participation in media industry rule-making](#), [media pluralism](#) and more.

We've supervised PhD candidates exploring the accountability of digital platforms following the Christchurch massacre, how [comments contribute to media diversity](#) and how [fake news might be prosecuted as fraud](#). We've produced reports commissioned by [the ACCC](#) and [the ACMA](#).

The impact of all this research is manifest in many ways. Two weeks ago, the NSW Attorney-General Mark Speakman cited the CMT's work on defamation in the second paragraph of his [Second Reading Speech](#) for the Defamation Amendment Bill 2020. There's also been [a book](#), with two more on the way. And all the while [First Draft](#) continues to combat mis- and disinformation.

Research is at the heart of what we do. But it isn't all we do. Back when international travel was still a thing, the CMT presented at conferences from London to Lugano, Jakarta to Siem

Reap, Hobart to Brisbane. We hosted events featuring Anya Schiffrin, Francesca Donner, Mark Deuze, Rob Wijnberg and Richard Gingras. And the CMT's team made more than 150 media appearances, in [The Australian](#), on [The Conversation](#), on [the ABC](#), on [2GB radio](#), in [The Wall Street Journal](#), in [regional press](#), and beyond.

To all those who have funded our work – a suitably diverse bunch including the ACCC, the ACMA, Google, Facebook and News Corp - a heartfelt thanks. Much of our work would not have been possible without you.

And at the risk of blowing our own flugelhorn a bit more, here's one more item to add to the list: this Sunday at 2.30pm, I'm appearing at the [Canberra Writers Festival](#) alongside the impressive duo of Ellen Broad and Toby Walsh in a session entitled, The End of Privacy? Moderated by *The Guardian's* Karen Middleton, it will be streamed live.



Sacha Molitorisz
Postdoctoral Fellow

Reimagining media - fostering progress through a pandemic



The Centre for Media Transition together with the [Australian Baha'i Community](#) is proud to be presenting the second in a series of conversations which seeks to examine the relationship between social cohesion and the role of the media.

The 'Reimagining the Australian Media Landscape' series launched on the eve of the first anniversary of the Christchurch attacks. The shock impelled by these attacks heightened our consciousness and offered an opening to examine the agency





and social responsibility of the media, particularly in how it can help to forge divides or fuel prejudice. A key insight generated from our first round table was how instructive times of crisis can be when examining the role of media in society.

Focusing on media responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, the second dialogue will seek to draw out practical insights on the positive values, principles and narratives arising from the media during the pandemic.

Journalists, media executives and those who work closely with the media are invited to join this ongoing learning space which seeks to facilitate a sincere dialogue about the role

of the media in society, its agency and civic responsibility, as a public good in light of the current pandemic.

Event Details

-  Date: Wednesday 19 August 2020
-  Time: 12Noon - 1.30pm
-  Where: Online via Zoom
-  Register: via [humanitix](#)



Chrisanthi Giotis
Postdoctoral Fellow

#CYMI You can read more of our publications and the reports below on our [website](#).



Have a great weekend!

Please visit our [website](#) or [facebook](#) and [twitter](#) pages for more information about us.

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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.



