

Hi there

## Standardising News Standards



Earlier this week *The Sydney Morning Herald* [ran a report](#) on how the financial pressures facing news publishers are likely to affect the Australian Press Council. A related problem is that some publishers such as The Guardian Australia are not members of the Council.

Here at the CMT we've argued – in [a 2019 policy submission](#) to the ACCC and [a 2019 submission to Treasury](#) as well as in [our 2018 research report](#) for the ACCC's Digital Platforms Inquiry –

that there's a design flaw in the media standards schemes in Australia. Not only does the print and online news sector use different standards from the broadcast sector, but each broadcast sub-sector – commercial television, commercial radio, pay TV, each of the national broadcasters – has its own code of practice.

Way back in 2012 the Convergence Review recommended a cross-platform, industry-based standards scheme. Since then, the last of Australia's cross-media ownership laws has been removed and digital platforms have become key distributors of news content. But we still have 14 different sets of rules about accuracy and fairness. It's time to fix that, and it may also be time that responsibility for funding a contemporary standards scheme is shared among publishers and the platforms that distribute the news.

We put this view in [our recent submission to the ACCC](#) on the forthcoming news media bargaining code. We also think it's only fair that any funding flowing to publishers under

that code is contingent on them being members of the standards scheme.

Interestingly, Facebook [is also proposing](#) a 'Digital News Media Council', which takes its inspiration from the Press Council. A Digital News Media Council would provide a forum for publishers and platforms to address disputes on matters covered by the bargaining code, and would also offer a broader platform for considering market and technological developments. Facebook has said it would be prepared to contribute to the costs of operating such a scheme.

Is a coherent news standards scheme finally on the way? Let's hope so.



**Derek Wilding**  
CMT Co-Director

## Surviving the infodemic

Last week ABC's the *Drum* dedicated a [segment to the work of First Draft](#) in Australia, noting how the 'back-to-back crises of 2020' have fuelled a wave of mis- and disinformation. In the interview, I pointed out how in this current 'infodemic' people have a heightened sense of fear, which is being exploited by agents of disinformation to sow division in society and push various ideologies. The segment covered the rise in anti-vaccination groups, the spread of conspiracy theories and the targeting of ethnic communities.



@unitednations

But there is some good news. In an effort to combat the deluge of online mis- and disinformation, journalists are now doing something they rarely did before - collaborating with competitors. And First Draft's CrossCheck platform is helping, by training reporters to [make sense](#) of what we refer to as 'information disorder'.

Right now, that means pivoting to include more media partners from New Zealand ahead of their election and referenda in September. First Draft this week began a series of key training sessions held in conjunction with the Google News Initiative. Dozens of reporters from metropolitan, local and rural newsrooms brushed up their verification

skills and learned about the tools and techniques used by agents of disinformation - and how not to be manipulated by them. Next week, training will focus on setting up social media monitoring and how to debunk mis- and disinformation most effectively.

Going by recent experience, the New Zealand polls loom as a big target for those motivated to sow fear and division, using manipulative content designed to trigger emotional responses.



**Anne Kruger**  
First Draft APAC Director

## Plunging into privacy research



Earlier this year, the Centre for Media Transition was gearing up to research privacy, consent and smartphones. Funded by a grant from the [iappANZ](#), we planned to assemble focus groups of about eight people in two locations, Sydney and Coffs Harbour. We wanted to ask whether consent works, what participants know about the law of privacy, what might improve their smartphone interactions, etc.

Shortly before we were due to hold the first focus group, however, Covid-19 forced us to postpone. It also forced us to rethink our methods. This involved going remote, which meant switching from face-to-face to Zoom, and reducing the size of each focus group. More sessions, fewer participants.

Four months later, the time has come. We're holding the first focus group next week, after recruiting [via social media](#).

What's more, the delay brought an upside. Covid-19 has given us more to talk about. That includes people's privacy concerns about platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, which have come to play a bigger part in many of our lives. It also includes the Covid-SAFE app, and ongoing debates about contact tracing.

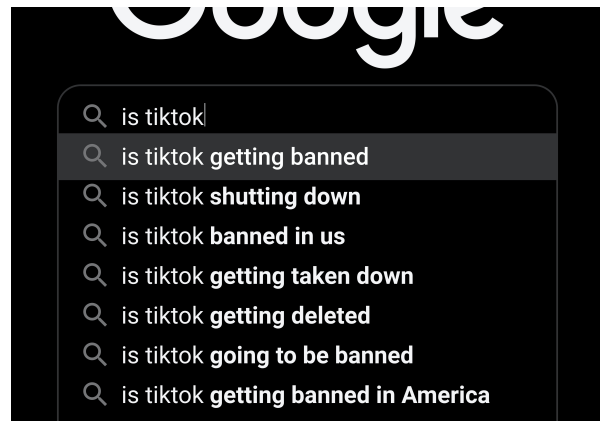
The research will be led by RMIT's [James Meese](#) and [me](#). We're joined by facilitator [Claire Marshall](#) and research assistant [Jenni Hagedorn](#). We'll publish the results later this year, including in a format not unlike our 2018 report into [trust and news media](#).



**Sacha Molitorisz**  
Postdoctoral Fellow

## To ban or not to ban?

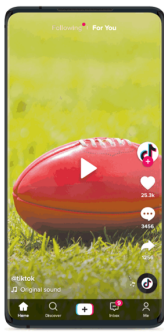
Speaking of privacy, does anyone remember Musical.ly? A few short years ago, the social media app boomed among users who danced and lip synced along to pop songs. Then came controversy, with reports of primary school kids mimicking the sexualised dance moves of performers such as Ariana Grande. Privacy and security concerns only grew when children were dressed in identifiable school uniforms. In August 2016, Sydney school Wenona [banned the app](#) for anyone under 13.



Whatever happened to Musical.ly? In 2018, having been bought by a Chinese company, it was [rebranded as TikTok](#). And while Musical.ly proved controversial, TikTok is at the centre of a building geopolitical storm.

Naturally, there are privacy concerns, given TikTok stores location and personal data. Australia's privacy laws, after all, urgently need reform, as [the ACCC](#) and [I have separately argued](#). These privacy concerns then tie into geopolitical concerns. Is China harvesting data about Aussies? Perhaps. As computer scientists Paul Haskell-Dowland and James Jin Kang [wrote in the Conversation](#), China could potentially be using TikTok to spy on Australians.

Calls to ban the app in Australia have followed. This follows the [banning of TikTok \(and other Chinese apps\) in India](#). The [US is also considering a ban](#). This week, in response, [TikTok placed full-page ads](#) in Australia's major newspapers. (Isn't it curious when digital platforms buy ads in print media, as [Mark Zuckerberg did in 2018](#) to apologise for Facebook's role in the Cambridge Analytica scandal.) 'We're fun', 'We're safe', and 'We're independent', this week's ads claimed, beneath the main message: 'Don't make Tiktok a political football.'



# Don't make TikTok a political football.

Millions of people have made TikTok one of Australia's most loved apps.

Australia's data has always been secure with us. We're focused on your safety every day.

We're fun We're safe We're independent



Authorised by Lee Hunter, General Manager, TikTok Australia Pty Ltd (Sydney)

The TikTok drama reveals just how changeable and turbulent the media landscape is. It also reveals how, in a digital age, a big media story is often about more than just media. Here, it's about the harvesting of data and the exercise of power. And increasingly we're learning just how interconnected data and power are. As historian Yuval Noah Harari explains by drawing on his own life, algorithms probably know you better than you know yourself.



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