

Hi there

Good policy, questionable character



If there's a competition for the year's best book title, I nominate *Character Limit*. The title adorns a new book by two *New York Times* journalists about Elon Musk and X. The book's subtitle is 'How Elon Musk Destroyed Twitter'. While Twitter once had a limit of 140 characters, there's seemingly no limit to the questions being asked about Musk's character.

The book is withering, says journalist and academic [Margaret Simons](#): 'The authors have gained extraordinary access, and the

results are devastating to Musk's reputation, and to [Jack] Dorsey's.' Simons herself doesn't hold back about all the 'men-children' who invented social media: 'They seemed idealistic about the public conversation, but their naivety meant that their idealism didn't survive encounters with reality.'

That naivety created major global challenges, to put it mildly. After a long lag, however, regulators, legislators and judges are mobilising. In Australia, the PM is talking about [a social media ban for anyone under 18](#). In California, Governor [Gavin Newsom signed legislation](#) last week requiring tech companies to make posts on teens' social media accounts appear by default in chronological order, rather than allowing algorithms to maximise engagement; the bill also prohibits notifications during school hours and sleep hours. And in X's Brazilian standoff, Elon Musk has capitulated, as Tamara details below.

Also in today's newsletter, Alana explores how the Paralympics mounted a campaign on TikTok, showing that it's important also to recall social media's upsides, including that it can bust stereotypes as it fosters diversity and inclusivity. And Alexia unveils the CMT's latest podcast, which covers the vexing challenges faced by Indian journalists in an age of misinformation.

In the face of these challenges, policymakers are changing their approach. As Sydney University scholars [Jo Gray](#), [Jonathon Hutchinson](#), [Milica Stilinovic](#) and [Nadia Tjahja](#) write, 'For many years, Internet policy was mainly a technocratic pursuit largely restricted to those with computational "expertise" ... During this period, there was an explicit commitment to multistakeholder governance models. However, as the Internet's capabilities, reach and impact around the world have grown, multistakeholderism has been challenged ...'

Updated approaches are needed, because today's media policy challenges are vast, straddling media new and old. Privacy is a particular concern. Recently [we learned Facebook was scraping](#) the data of Australian users (and non-users, presumably) to train its AI; and in the background [data brokers keep buying and selling](#) our data with contemptuous disregard for consent, as the ANU's Priya Dev wrote [in a sobering piece](#) published this week in *The Conversation*.

In Australia, privacy law has been under review since 2020. Two weeks ago, [the government presented a bill](#) to Parliament including provisions for the introduction of a tort for serious invasions of privacy. This is a no-brainer, as the [Australian Law Reform Commission argued](#) so forcefully 10 years ago. Unfortunately, though, journalism will be exempt, just as it is exempt from the *Privacy Act*. The justification for this exemption is that journalism is held accountable under professional standards schemes enforced by bodies such as the Australian Media and Communications Authority and the Australian Press Council.

Unfortunately, [as we've previously argued](#), these schemes are inconsistent and inadequate, leaving Australian news media shockingly unaccountable. For now, it seems, the most effective journalistic oversight regularly comes from the ABC's *Media Watch* (for which media consultant Hal Crawford has [some interesting advice](#)). The privacy bill is currently before the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, which is [accepting submissions until October 11](#). If you want a say, now's your chance.

Look, it's a start, and we can always improve it. As Gray et al write, 'Good policymaking is a journey rather than a destination - good policy is never truly complete, it requires constant review and adjustments.' Just like character.



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X wants to come to Brazil after all



After a [dramatic exit last month](#), X looks set to return to Brazil after the social media giant reportedly complied with orders from the Brazilian Supreme Court. It's too soon to tell, but X's surprise turnaround may bode well for other countries looking to enforce stronger regulation measures over the platform's activities. This includes Australia, where the federal government has recently tabled a revised [draft bill](#) on combatting misinformation and disinformation, which would give ACMA prescribed regulatory oversight over digital

platforms. (Michael Davis [gave his initial](#) response to the revised bill in our previous CMT newsletter.)

As reported in the [New York Times](#), X agreed to a court order to take down user accounts because they 'threatened Brazil's democracy'. X also appointed local legal representatives and paid its outstanding fines, which included a fine of about five million BRL (AU\$1.33 billion) for the platform's temporary reappearance in Brazil following the block.

Though not the first time X has [complied with government demands](#), the episode did make for a grimly amusing back-and-forth between X owner Elon Musk and Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes. However, X is not out of the woods just yet: according to the court, X must file additional documentation before it can be restored in Brazil.

In Australia, proposed legislation will see X and other digital platforms subject to new obligations designed to manage the risk of misinformation and disinformation on their services. The Australian Communications and Media Authority, or ACMA, will have the power to create and approve binding codes and standards. ACMA will also adopt information gathering and record-keeping powers to assess compliance, as well as the authority to issue remedial directions in cases of non-compliance. Platforms may be fined if the standards or remedial directions are contravened.

Last week, right on cue, ACMA [released its third misinformation report](#). It found that 75 per cent of Australians are concerned about misinformation, up from 69 per cent in 2022. It also found that transparency reports published under the new voluntary [Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation](#) do provide insights, but lack consistent Australian

data. This means, says ACMA, 'Australians cannot be confident that platforms are delivering on code commitments.'

The new bill seeks to improve on the voluntary code, but of course there are critics, including Musk, who called the Australian government 'fascists'. This left [the government unconcerned](#), [Bill Shorten](#) quipping that Musk 'had more positions on free speech than the Kama Sutra.'



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TikTok's paralympic partnership



Social media is facing major changes both here and abroad. In Australia, apart from the revised misinformation bill, the Albanese Government has said legislation will be introduced this year [to impose an age restriction](#) for Australians using social media platforms. So it's interesting to note that the International Paralympic Committees (IPC) partnered with TikTok for the recent Paris 2024 Paralympics. And one clear aim of TikTok Australia's partnership with Paralympics Australia was to change community perceptions, with

Generation Z and millennials as the main target audiences.

TikTok is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company. On the one hand, TikTok presents a potential security and privacy risk for the Australian Government, as revealed by the app's ban on government devices in April 2023. On the other hand, it also has the potential to increase diversity and representation in the media by reaching large audiences of young people.

In their article '[The \(In\)validity of Supercrip Representation of Paralympian athletes](#)', authors Carla Filomena Silva and P. David Howe argue that media patterns of disability representation have been 'manufactured alongside an emotional "ethos" that reproduces the dominant binary abled/disabled'. They argue that conventional Paralympic stories tend to highlight individuals who have overcome adversity, thereby depicting people with

impairments as “super” in contexts where an able-bodied individual would be just an ordinary person’. Consequently, a person’s identity is framed as their disability rather than their skill in sports.

By contrast, the content that featured on the @ausparalympics TikTok page challenged these stereotypes and did not play into a dominant binary. Rather, the content informed audiences, particularly in video explainers of sports such as [‘para-table tennis’](#) and interviews with para-athletes such as [Ameera Lee](#). These appeared alongside highlights such as [Michael Roeger’s silver medal win](#).

Of course, we should be concerned about the way social media platforms can spread false information and about the vulnerability of young users, just as we should be concerned about bad journalism practice that does not incorporate fairness, balance and ethical editorial judgement. But in the partnership between TikTok and the Paralympics, diversity and good story-telling were fostered. It was more than a mere PR stunt.



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DoubleTake: Info integrity in India



In August this year, the CMT brought together editors from India, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines to exchange information about the problems they’re experiencing in combatting mis- and dis-information.

The editors don’t expect meaningful regulation against mis- and disinformation largely because their ruling political parties are often implicated in both its production and spread. Rather, these editors are more concerned about the degree of censorship that appears to be taking place in their

individual news media ecosystems, even though they’re constantly told they live in democracies where free speech is respected.

In India, digital-born news publications are fighting not just mis- and dis-information, but the overwhelming financial power of corporate media, which has the support of

government. Sustainability remains difficult for independent outlets, especially in an environment where political advertising is the norm, and which by and large goes to big media. To make matters worse, the very people being reported on have the power to launch protracted and financially crippling attacks of 'lawfare' against journalists. On top of all of this, deepfakes have hit the Indian news media industry when it was already struggling against the tide of false narratives.

Against this backdrop, we asked the editors who came to CMT how generative AI could be used to advance ethical journalism, and whether they saw co-regulation as a viable alternative to state and platform autonomies. In this episode of Double Take, our regional consultant and expert on South Asian media Kean Wong asks what the editors took away from the forum, and what lies ahead for them and the media industry in India.

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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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