

Hi there

Lowering the temperature



The news of the week has of course focused on the assassination attempt on Donald Trump. The incident so encapsulates the breakdown of American politics that it arrived almost with an air of inevitability. The rolling coverage here has sought to make sense of it for an Australian audience, but along with the many expressions of shock and deep concern, much of the rhetoric suggests that something deep is at stake in Australian politics as much as in America's. That what happens in America not only affects Australia in a geopolitical sense, but

in a way which strikes at our own political self-image.

Sussan Ley, deputy leader of the opposition conveyed in sombre tone on the ABC how the assassination attempt was a shocking and shameless breach of 'our democratic values, and not who we are.' It was time, she said, for all Australians to show how much they care about the issue, but without 'raising the temperature', a sentiment reflected also by Anthony Albanese at a specially convened media conference.

It's an interesting question just how much Australia should see any implications for itself in a very American political event. But the point about political temperature is an important one. It indicates a recognition of how readily not only news and information, but also rhetoric, communication strategies and political talking points, flow between our nations in the digital age. The same is of course seen in the way that misinformation and conspiracies narratives fly around the virtual globe, insinuating their way into local political discourse.

These were of course in no short supply after the events in Butler, Pennsylvania. Screenshots of mainstream media headlines -- appropriately cautious in the wake of the breaking news -- were circulated on social media as supposed evidence of a leftist plot. As Charlie Warzel [notes in the Atlantic](#), such caution can have the 'unfortunate side effect of sometimes seeming absurd'. Warzel goes on to argue that 'perhaps the core of the fight over misinformation isn't so much about the increase of fake news or alternate realities as it is about a societal devaluing of restraint, rigor, and other hallmarks of the journalistic process'.

We can extend this point beyond journalism. So much of our conceptualisation of the misinformation problem focuses on truth. But it is not a problem that can be solved by reducing our exposure to falsehoods, if that were even feasible. We would do better to focus on restraint, judiciousness, and civility. Even in our regulatory focus, we should be demanding that our information ecosystem be calibrated to encourage these intellectual virtues, rather than the vices that currently plague us online. More on that in a future newsletter!

Turning to this week's newsletter, Chris Hall looks at how some Australian journalists and smaller newsrooms could benefit not only from adopting more social-media-savvy production values, but also from the business model adopted by many YouTube content-producers. Ayesha Jehangir casts a critical eye on the news that the Washington Post has released its own climate-change chatbot. And Simon Levett examines the potential investigation by the International Criminal Court of journalists' deaths in Gaza – which number 108 as of 15 July.

In other CMT news, on 1 and 2 August we will host the Information Integrity Forum 2024 with 16 senior news editors from India, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. We have partnered with the U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Australia to deliver the forum, which will examine challenges to regional information environments posed by mis- and disinformation and GenAI, as well as regulatory responses.

On 7 August, we are hosting an online panel looking at the state of regional news in Australia after a decade of cutbacks and closures. More on that below.

Finally, it is with great sadness, but also pride, that we are soon to say goodbye to CMT postdoctoral fellow Ayesha Jehangir. Ayesha will be taking up a lecturer position at University of New South Wales. What is our loss will be UNSW's gain. We wish her the best of luck.



Michael Davis
CMT Research Fellow

Profitable journalism: like & subscribe



Journalism has a funding problem. Journalists are [losing their jobs](#) as a result. News businesses have tried various models to sustain their operations, while the Australian government has also attempted to address it through initiatives like the [News Media Bargaining Code](#) and the [News Media Assistance Program](#).

One underexplored funding strategy for journalism is the [youtuber business model](#). The growth of youtuber journalism indicates that this is a viable option for

funding video journalism, especially long-form journalism.

In my PhD research I have identified two key elements of this business model: diversified revenue streams, and youtuber presentation styles and production norms.

Diversified income is a prominent feature of the youtuber model. While YouTube ad money is important as a revenue stream, it is [unpredictable and insufficient](#). The bulk of revenue comes from audience contributions, generally via [Patreon](#). In-video sponsorships are also an important part of the mix, and merchandise is a minor revenue stream.

Presentation style is an essential part of this business model. It is more than simply uploading videos to YouTube. The videos need to be made specifically *for* YouTube.

A professional youtuber goes out of their way to avoid looking like polished corporate media. There is generally a main presenter, and the rest of the team is hidden all or most of the time. The tone is conversational and the outfits are generally quite casual. Editing styles and production techniques differ from those of other news media formats and genres. The set is low budget, backgrounds are simple, for example bookshelves illuminated by [bisexual lighting](#). Editing involves jump cuts, zoom cuts, and text directly addressing the viewer, especially to explain a mistake or update. All this gives a sense of authenticity and allows trust to be built over time.

The youtuber business model, including these presentation norms, is being adopted by some professional but now-independent journalists. [Michael West](#) and [John Cadogan](#) have several decades of combined experience as journalists across print, TV, and radio. West prioritises YouTube as it attracts up to four times as many eyeballs as articles on his news website do. Cadogan emphasises the importance of authenticity for audiences when he says his videos 'get TV type numbers worth of views because of authenticity'.

Also, many youtubers, who once focused solely on education or entertainment, are now regularly producing journalism. These youtubers are adopting professional journalistic norms, such as factchecking, to produce fact-based stories on issues of public interest.

We can therefore see a convergence, where certain youtubers and journalists are evolving towards each other- towards what I suggest is a new journalism format, [platform journalism](#).

Interestingly, there are signs that some in mainstream news organisations are taking the youtuber presentation style seriously, even if they are unlikely to fully embrace the business model. The ABC's [Media Bites](#) is an example. However, major news organisations such as the ABC and Sky News dramatically underperform in views compared to youtubers with similar subscriber counts. Not fully adopting youtuber norms could be the reason. A perceived lack of authenticity could be another. Small news media outlets and independent journalists are better positioned to use YouTube effectively compared to large news corporations as they have fewer bureaucratic hurdles and are more likely to come across as an authentic, non-corporate youtuber.

In any case, the market for [online news videos is growing](#). There is audience demand for journalism presented in the youtuber style. And when the diversified revenue stream is applied there is profit potential. By adopting the ways of youtubers, journalists just might reach more of their audience, and make a profit doing it.



Chris Hall
UTS HDR Student

Hall of mirrors



Last week, *The Washington Post* launched a new AI tool called 'Climate Answers'. The chatbot, which is now available on the outlet's homepage, its app, and inside its articles, is designed to answer readers' questions about climate change, the environment, sustainable energy, and related issues. What makes it different from other chatbots is that Climate Answers uses the outlet's own respected climate reporting to answer these questions.

This is an interesting new model and one that can be replicated by other newsrooms. For starters, it is cost-efficient, in that leveraging existing journalistic content minimises the need for constant updates. Since it uses the outlet's reporting, and is designed not to produce responses for questions it does not have an answer for, the probability of misinformation is reduced. And by relying on its own reporting, the Post also minimises risks of running into legal issues, such as copyright suits by external parties for using their content.

However, there are serious concerns that are not limited to [AI's massive environmental footprint](#) and [soaring emissions](#) (a ChatGPT query needs nearly 10 times as much electricity as a Google search query).

While a dedicated AI chatbot, drawing only on one newsroom's (or company's) archives minimises the risk of misinformation, it increases the risk of bias because it draws only on a single source. We know that generative AI can be [more biased than humans](#); it [discriminates](#) in harmful ways; and can [perpetuate racial and gender stereotypes](#). I have [previously](#) expressed concerns about the whiteness of AI, and am increasingly troubled by the tendency of these tools to spin up and regurgitate disturbing clichés: Refugees are a burden. Prisoners are black. Political leaders are men. Diversity is tokenistic. China is a threat.

The bias of a particular news outlet will be replicated in its chatbot output, while the perceived trustworthiness of chatbots will leave many users convinced that they have a complete and accurate answer to the question they asked it.

What if AI also propagates war-orientated and conflict-escalatory narratives in more harmful ways than what we see now – if, say, the Post's model is replicated by partisan newsrooms and applied to broader topics including politics, society, migration, and war and conflict?

The answer to this bias would seem to lie in broader training of these models, but that again increases the risk of inaccuracies and will not eliminate systemic bias across different outlets.

For instance, to a question of whether China is a threat to Australia, a proprietary chatbot, whether trained on only one Australian newsroom's output or that of many, would provide a response that reflects the dominant narrative - that China is a threat to Australia.

Or to a question about religion and politics, the response would likely reflect what Crikey has noted to be [a lack of religious literacy](#) by a majority of journalists in a country that is rich with religious diversity.

The bias in reporting of international wars has also been quite apparent. When coverage of an attack on one hospital makes headlines like ['Israeli military says its forces have entered Gaza hospital in a 'precise and targeted operation'](#) and an attack on another

reads "[No words for this](#)": horror over Russian bombing of Kyiv children's hospital', it doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand what the problem is and where it lies.

AI-powered chatbots are learning everything from existing content, and narrowing AI will not solve the problem of bias. In fact, it will pick up on racist undertones and implicit linguistic bias in journalistic content and replicate it in its responses to user queries. What journalism desperately needs is a genuine investment in accurate and representative reporting, particularly of how the 'other' is reported. Unless that is taken seriously, journalism and other content that is reproduced by AI tools and chatbots will end up becoming a hall of mirrors in which the public will continue to learn from our worst journalistic impulses, blocking their view of what's actually happening outside the mirror world.



Ayesha Jehangir
CMT Postdoctoral Fellow

ICC to protect journalists, and their sources



Reporters San Frontières (RSF), having issued multiple complaints to the International Criminal Court (ICC) has [called on the court](#) to investigate the deaths of journalists in Gaza. The ICC has assured RSF that it is looking into the matter.

The call comes in the wake of the grisly findings that, as of 15 July, [108 journalists have been murdered](#) since the 7 October Hamas attacks on Israel and the invasion of Gaza, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

The ICC has [indicated its willingness](#) to hear evidence about criminal responsibility, with arrest warrants issued for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, defence chief Yoav Gallant and also three Hamas leaders, Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Al-Masri and Ismail Haniyeh, for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

It is a change of direction for the ICC, given that Israel is not a party to the court. Similarly, arrest warrants [were issued against](#) Russian president Vladimir Putin in March for the atrocities committed in the Ukraine. Russia is also not a party to the ICC.

Article 15(1) of the [ICC statute](#) holds that ‘the Prosecutor may initiate investigations *proprio motu* on the basis of information on crimes within the jurisdiction of the court’. The Prosecutor may seek information from reliable sources to establish the seriousness of the information.

ICC investigators will encounter difficulties in their investigations as they may be blocked from accessing Gaza to find information about war-time atrocities. There has been [next-to-zero access](#) to Gaza by foreign correspondents, who remain confined to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

Any investigation will therefore be highly dependent on local journalists, who have continued to report on the conflict. Journalists, including foreign correspondents and freelancers, are protected as civilians under international law.

However, because they are considered civilians, journalists lack a special status in international law, meaning that the protection of their professional activities – according to the doctrines of distinction and proportionality – is implied rather than self-evident.

United Nations Security Council [Resolution 2222](#) recalls its previous demand that ‘all parties to an armed conflict comply fully with the obligations applicable to them under international law related to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including journalists, media professionals and associated personnel’.

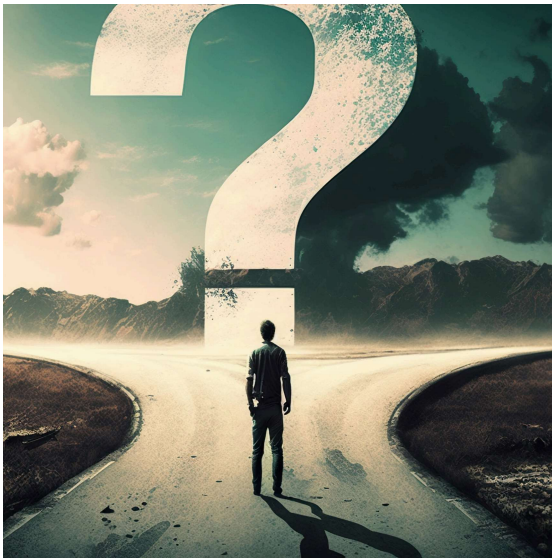
Similarly, the ICC may have to respond to allegations that journalists ought to lose their protected civilian status because they have been connected to Hamas, [as has been contended in this conflict](#) and, in the past, for example, in relation to the bombing of the Al-Aqsa television station in Gaza in 2012.

Foreign correspondents who cooperate with the ICC have been reassured that the highly confidential nature of their activities – including their sources – will be protected. A decision before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) [found in 2002](#) that a war correspondent working for the Washington Post did not have to disclose his sources to the tribunal despite the gravity of the charges. At any rate, the protection of journalists, however flawed, will certainly be central to any response by the organs of international law.



Simon Levett
UTS HDR Student

Where to now for regional news?



On Wednesday 7 August, the CMT will bring an online panel together to ask, where to now for regional news media in Australia after a decade of brutal cutbacks and closures? This event will take into account some of the findings of the near three years of research we have been conducting on how regional news finds its way and is represented to metro audiences. This research, funded by the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, has resulted in the establishment of the Guardian Australia Rural Reporting

Network and the appointment of five UTS Journalism graduates to regional reporting locations for Guardian Australia.

Monica will be speaking with one of our student reporters assigned to Guardian Australia for a year, the editor of Guardian Australia's Rural Reporting Network, the former head of ABC rural and regional reporting and a former editor of the now defunct Broken Hill Barrier Truth:

- **Fleur Connick**, UTS journalism graduate assigned to Deniliquin NSW for Guardian Australia, currently ABC Science cadet
- **Calla Wahlquist**, Rural and Regional Editor at Guardian Australia
- **Hugh Martin**, ABC Regional Editor, Victoria
- **Tony Bosworth**, Editor at West Wyalong Advocate, former Editor at Broken Hill's Barrier Truth.

They'll address, among other things, how people living in urban areas will know what is happening in rural and regional Australia if there's a diminishing number of journalists to report it? And how will the voices of Australians living in rural and regional Australia be heard in the big policy debates we see being discussed in metro media?

We're holding the event online at 12pm so you can pop in over lunch.

[Register here](#)



Alexia Giacomazzi

CMT Events and Communications Manager

We hope you have enjoyed reading this edition of the *Centre for Media Transition* newsletter | *Lowering the temperature - Issue 13/2024*

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