

Hi there

## Jobs, tax breaks and keeping info clean



We trust everyone reading our newsletter here in Australia is staying warm.

There's been a lot of media movement in the past fortnight. The ABC was able to boast its return to the number one online news brand spot, held most recently by News Corp's News.com.au. According to the latest [Ipsos](#) Iris data, the ABC had almost 12.6 million unique visitors in June, a resurgence presumably reflecting activity in the news cycle, especially international news.

Sport did some heavy lifting (Wimbledon Championship, the Euro Football Championship and the State of Origin). But there was also the search for British TV presenter Michael Mosely, sadly found dead; a Presidential debate in the US and the fallout from it, and the lead up to a contentious general election in the UK, all of which – along with the cold weather – seemed to have Australians flocking to the ABC. That the ABC was the site of choice indicates that when it comes to international events, Australians gravitate towards the national broadcaster. Hopefully, the ABC will take the hint and revisit the diminished number of foreign correspondents it has in the field as a result of budget cuts, and its decisions to 'hub' international reporting.

In the meantime, journalists at Nine newspapers, the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age

have been on strike over a pay deal, the same week as the Paris summer Olympics got underway. The dispute surely invites the observation that the TV side of Nine Media seems to be doing pretty well, with traditionally higher salaries unimpeded by any business contractions and reports of extravagant spending in Paris for those covering the Olympics, whilst their newspaper cousins have experienced cutbacks and redundancies. Not that family relations are any happier over at News Corp: dozens of journalists there have been made redundant whilst their owners quibble over an inviolable trust that Rupert Murdoch is seeking to alter to ensure his chosen pick for Tsar of the empire keeps his crown when the elder passes. Its making for fascinating [copy](#).

This newsletter, Gary Dickson takes a close look at what might be some good news for journalism the final [report](#) of the Productivity Commission on the question of removing some of the barriers that prevent registered charities from accessing deductible gift recipient (DGR) status.

Kean Wong gives you a peek at the Information Integrity Forum which is wrapping up at CMT as you receive this newsletter in your inbox! We have brought 16 editors from India, The Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia to UTS to talk about the problems they're facing in their newsrooms with mis- and disinformation. We'll let you know what those challenges are in our next newsletter.

Michael takes a look at the use of deep fakes in political campaigns and the corrosive impact of its normalisation (should that occur), whilst Miguel D'Souza brings you the latest news in the world of generative AI. By the way, if you're curious about how Australian editors have been thinking about the use of genAI, have a read of our 2023 report [here](#).

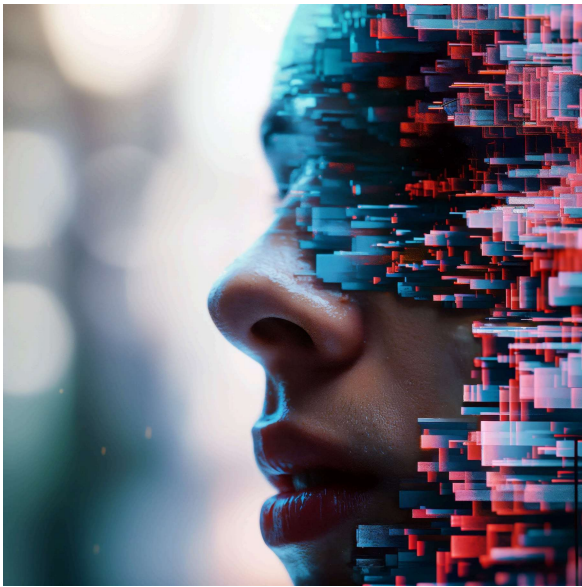


**Monica Attard**  
CMT Co-Director

## Dirty dancing

News last week that Queensland's Liberal National Party had released an AI-generated 'deepfake' video of premier Steven Miles dancing on TikTok has led to both ridicule and concern. Miles [said it marked](#) 'a very dangerous turning point' and declared that QLD Labor would not follow the LNP down the AI path. He might be left holding that flag though, with observers soon noting that on 4 June the [federal ALP released](#) a similar political parody video featuring Peter Dutton.

The two videos are actually pretty innocuous parodies, and both are marked – in the post,



not in the videos themselves – as AI-generated. But there is still reason to be concerned if the videos signal a coming normalisation of deepfakes in political advertising. Other countries have seen growing use of AI-generated content in political communications. This includes, again relatively innocuously, using AI-generated video of dead politicians to endorse current candidates in both [India](#) and [Indonesia](#), and on the deeply troubling side, using [audio](#) and [video](#) deepfakes of political figures to deceive voters in

campaign callouts or via the media. This week, Elon Musk [shared a video](#) on X – in potential [violation of the platform's rules](#) – featuring fabricated audio of Kamala Harris that is clearly parody but also contains statements that may mislead viewers about what Harris believes or has said.

AI-generated content can be deceptive when the context of its production or communication is obscured, as we saw when images of Donald Trump's arrest [created and shared online](#) by Bellingcat co-founder Eliot Higgins, went viral. There is added risk with political content, especially during election campaigns. At the individual level, a deceptive advertisement, or a series of them, may mislead people into changing their vote. And a political environment where deepfakes are normalised may be one of endemic distrust, granting a ['liar's dividend'](#) to the unscrupulous. This is surely something we want to avoid.

The Senate is [currently considering](#) laws to criminalise the creation and sharing of sexually explicit deepfakes, but Australia is yet to take any action on other high-risk uses of AI following the Department of Industry's discussion paper on responsible AI last year. Electoral laws are also of little help. Section 329 of the Commonwealth Electoral Act proscribes deceptive communications only where they concern how to vote. South Australia and the ACT have broader prohibitions, but these are limited to paid advertising. The proposed Combatting Disinformation and Misinformation Bill may provide an avenue to address deliberately deceptive unauthorised political advertising, but it would not apply to authorised electoral advertising. In any case, since it is targeted at digital platforms, it will provide no sanction against the creators or disseminators of the deepfakes.

Despite his concern for the impact of political deepfakes on democracy, Steven Miles has ruled out stronger laws for Queensland. But federally, both parties [have indicated support](#). The Australian people also support stronger protections. An [Australia Institute poll](#) conducted during the Voice Referendum last year found that 87 per cent of voters support such laws, and recent research from cybersecurity firm McAfee showed [rising concern](#)

amongst Australian voters about the potential for deepfakes to manipulate voters. Acting on political deepfakes now would give us the opportunity to nip the problem in the bud, before our public sphere is degraded by more pernicious political ads than those featuring a little dirty dancing.



**Michael Davis**  
CMT Research Fellow

## Our neighbours come to the CMT!



Wrong information, misinformation, and the malevolent manipulation of information known as disinformation have long been the core tasks of journalism. It's this issue of information integrity, and the challenges posed in this pursuit, whether from politics, business or technology, that we hope to unravel this week at our Information Integrity Forum 2024. In the uncertain democracies of Indonesia, the Philippines, India, and Malaysia, the need for good credible media has seldom been greater. We have brought senior editors from all of

these nations to UTS to discuss how to achieve information integrity at a time when democracy and rights to free speech are in retreat.

From using tightened laws to regulate online critics in Indonesia, Malaysia and India, to using corporate and tax regulations to constrain and censor media owners in the Philippines and India, the so-called 'lawfare' against critical news reporting has become widespread.

Unsurprisingly, there's an ambivalence bordering on distrust in these countries over government regulation of information and the media, despite huge concerns over unregulated social media, which has undermined both business models and audience trust in news reporting. According to our forum's participants, they struggle to fight against the trust found in the kinship of closed social media groups, no matter the information integrity, and the betrayal of media audiences by the business scramble to survive with clickbait and sensational tales.



As the so-called 'great powers' contest between China and the United States plays out in our region, Australian newsrooms, as well as those in our neighbouring countries are shrinking, with fewer journalists reporting the upheavals reflected in a contest that affects our economies, our politics, and the way information is weaponised against democracies. But can addressing this shortfall in media resources be done by using generative AI tools, while ensuring information integrity is sustained, despite what some of our colleagues point out are the inherent Western language-trained biases of such technology?

As Australia launches its 'Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy' this month, these are some of the challenges faced in our region by the leading editors and media managers gathered at our Information Integrity Forum. Solutions are hard to come but coming together to explore possible solutions is worth the effort.



**Kean Wong**

Co-founder of Malaysia's Centre for Independent Journalism

## AI-fuelled developments



A little more than halfway through a very difficult 2024 and Australian news outlets are starting to reveal some of their efforts in adopting GenAI technology to boost output or audience forecasting.

Nine Entertainment CEO Mike Sneesby told an investors' briefing in May this year that the Domain property website had adopted AI-powered editorial assistants which could increase page views fourfold 'by using AI to compile research and data sources. The [technology boosted](#)

content productivity from [producing] 1-2 stories per week to 6-8.'

Nine also [rolled out](#) 9Express in March this year, using a Google VertexAI application developed out of an internal AI-themed [hackathon](#) at the network. 9Express re-writes TV stories by Nine journalists into news articles, adding that the story "Is checked again by a producer [before](#) being published. All 9Express stories carry the notation; 'This article was produced with the assistance of 9ExPress.'

Nine has previously confirmed it is in negotiations with major [AI firms](#), including Google to train an LLM on its content. A month after the investors briefing where he detailed AI developments at Domain and 9Express, Nine announced job cuts of up to 200 jobs across its publishing divisions, [blaming](#) a weaker advertising market and the conclusion of the Meta deal.

Seven West has also adopted ideas from an AI-themed hackathon, with a three-week concept development event called [Ignite](#) producing more than 60 product ideas, with software engineers working with sports journalists, commercial teams and other staff.

Seven West's efforts appear to be focussed on audience and advertising, with the network revealing it is using predictive intelligence to forecast audience viewing numbers up to a month in advance. Stage one of three predicting audience numbers up to a week in advance, is already in place after Seven West ran a 'seven-day rolling prediction of audience figures,' which achieved [accuracy](#) above expectations. Seven is working with AI data specialists [DataBricks](#) on rolling out the three stages, which will culminate in the one month audience prediction.

The ABC published an AI statement of [principles](#) in late June, holding staff 'accountable for any ABC content created using AI,' and promising to 'inform our audiences about how we are using AI technologies,' as well as mitigating bias. Earlier this year, a leaked internal email revealed the ABC is planning its [own LLM](#) (Large Language Model) , and also announcing that the ABC's Innovation Lab is testing out 'pilots using AI', according to the report. Citing 'security, legal and editorial risks,' the ABC also warned staff against using their ABC accounts to access ChatGPT or Midjourney.

News Corp has been busy on the AI front, updated its editorial [policy](#) on March 20 this year to add nine AI-related conditions. These include prohibiting staff uploading content to AI platforms without seeking permission first.



**Miguel D'Souza**  
CMT Researcher

## Giving news - a chance?

The headline recommendation of the Productivity Commission's [final report into philanthropy](#) is to remove barriers that prevent registered charities from accessing deductible gift recipient (DGR) status. It could be good news for public interest journalism.



Under the existing system, not-for-profits go through a two-stage process: first to register as a charity, then to apply for access to tax-deductible gifts. The second step is far from automatic. Though there are around 60,000 registered charities in Australia, only 25,000 have achieved DGR status.

The Commission's proposed reforms would simplify this process and provide registered charities with DGR status automatically if they are undertaking activities which

provide a public benefit and which would be unlikely to occur without philanthropic support.

This change would cause the number of charities with DGR status to rise to around 40,000, including those which produce public interest journalism.

Currently, not-for-profit news organisations [must travel a long and complex road](#) in order to obtain DGR status. Journalism is not a charitable purpose, and so not-for-profit media apply under other categories – public education, community building – usually to little success. Outside of community radio, very few have managed it, and this is [a serious barrier](#) to developing charitable news in Australia.

The Productivity Commission draws on the experiences of the not-for-profit media sector when making its case that the process for applying for DGR under what is called the 'specific listing' approach is 'opaque and difficult to navigate'.

The Commission did not go so far as to recommend a new charitable purpose for public interest journalism, despite urging by the Public Interest Journalism Initiative, Croakey Health Media, AAP, and others. It concluded that there is no strong case for a separate definition but stressed that journalism should be considered eligible in the existing 'Other charitable purposes' category. Under its proposed reforms, this would be enough to provide DGR status to not-for-profit media, a benefit the Commission notes repeatedly in its report.

The Government is [still finalising its response to the recommendations](#). The necessary process may still take years, but if the Government adopts the recommended reforms, the most serious barrier to the development of a charitable news sector in Australia could be taken down.

**Gary Dickson**



## DoubleTake: Crikey's AI Ban



In June, the independent online publication, Crikey, declared it intends to ban AI-generated news. It used the words ‘unhuman slop’ to describe computer generated articles – and that puts Crikey in a camp that most news outlets have avoided. Indeed, many have signed deals with generative AI manufacturers and distributors to allow their content to be mined for training large language models.

It’s early days yet – generative AI only announced itself to the world in November

2022 and most newsrooms are still trying to figure out how it can be used ethically. Still - shouldn't newsrooms be considering the advantages of AI - and particularly generative AI - to better engage with audiences, counter mis- and disinformation, or even create much needed forms of revenue? Or is there an ethical imperative to inhibit its use for journalistic copy and image generation? In our latest episode of Double Take, CMT researcher Kieran Lindsay speaks with Crikey’s associate editor Cam Wilson, who covers internet culture and tech in Australia. Listen to it [here](#).

And whilst we’re here: if you are Sydney based, please sign up for our focus group on regional news and information on **Tuesday August 20 at UTS Broadway**.

We are researching what regional and local news and information people need and want and whether those of us living in urban locations should know more about what was happening in regional Australia. After deep conversation stops in NSW's Northern Rivers, Riverina and Central West regions, we’re convening the final two-hour group discussion in Sydney on August 20 at 12noon. We want to hear what Sydney-siders expect and need in their news, and how they value regional news.





Regional News Media Focus  
Group



If you are in Sydney, and would like to join, please use the QR code to register your interest.



**Alexia Giacomazzi**

CMT Events and Communications Manager

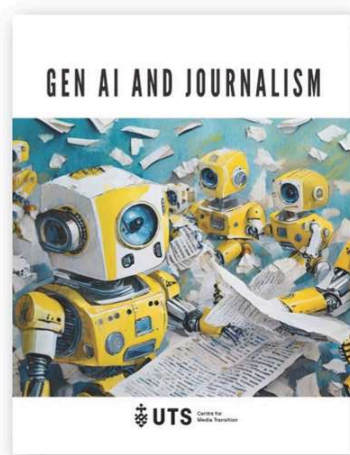
We hope you have enjoyed reading this edition of the *Centre for Media Transition newsletter* | *Jobs, tax breaks and keeping info clean - Issue 14/2024*

**ISSN 2981-989X**

This serial can be accessed online [here](#) and through the National Library of Australia. Please feel free to share our fortnightly newsletter with colleagues and friends! And if this was forwarded to you, please subscribe by clicking the button below:

Subscribe

Please visit our [website](#) for more information about the Centre .



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.



[Privacy Statement](#) | [Disclaimer](#) | [Unsubscribe](#)

UTS CRICOS Provider Code: 00099F

This email was sent by University of Technology Sydney, PO Box 123 Broadway NSW 2007, Australia