

Hi Rosa

## Two days of information



CMT'ers have been busy this last week. We brought together a group of editors from India, Malaysia, Indonesia and The Philippines to exchange information on the problems each of us are experiencing in combatting mis and disinformation.

Not unexpectedly, there was keen interest in the proposed Australian law to provide the independent regulator, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), with new powers to combat online misinformation and disinformation. The bill

includes a backstop power for the regulator to impose codes or standards if platforms fail to put policies in place.

Creina Chapman, deputy chair of the Australian Communications and Media Authority, told the editors "It's all about transparency and holding digital platforms to account on the information they're holding on their platforms, and which they're amplifying in some cases. The principle is that platforms should be expected to have policies in place about how they'll deal with material on their platforms. They should have robust complaints mechanisms for individuals to be able to come to the platforms and be confident that it's going to be dealt with and the public should be confident that action will be taken where it is necessary."

Also at the table was Alan Sunderland, former Editorial Policy chief at the ABC, who said resistance to the bill is based on a reflexive opposition to government having any sway over media, and the self-interest of media organisations striving to place themselves as the arbiters of truth and the platforms as hotbeds of mis and disinformation.

For our guest editors, the biggest challenge in trying to contain mis and disinformation is one which shouldn't surprise anyone. Samar Harlankar of India's [Article 14](#) online publication pointed out the difficulty in regulating against mis and disinformation when the ruling political parties are key culprits.

“How do you fight disinformation when the very authority that's to assist and staunch disinformation is the perpetrator? And the government has tools, laws and law enforcement agencies, so it's very difficult to work against this,” Samar explained.

In Malaysia, the government has decidedly mixed reviews in its disinformation role, especially during fraught election contests. But the Malaysian editors are also working with the Anwar Ibrahim government to ensure it delivers its previous promise of legislating for an industry-run media council that would enable self-regulation and rescind historic censorship laws.

The revived fortunes of dictatorship-era families that now occupy the presidential palaces of the Philippines and Indonesia also left the editors we invited to the forum feeling, at best, ambivalent about the roles their new governments would play against disinformation. There is democratic space and political accountability to defend in Indonesia, said [IDN](#) Times editor Uni Lubis, along with curbing disinformation from politicians who've won power, which remains a struggle.



II Forum News Editors visit the ABC



II Forum News Editors at UTS

Also in this newsletter, Miguel takes a look at a network of AI operated accounts, linked to a Chinese university and a Chinese AI company which have appeared on X (formerly

Twitter). The accounts – some 5000 of them – target contentious US narratives on China but also amplify political issues in Australia.

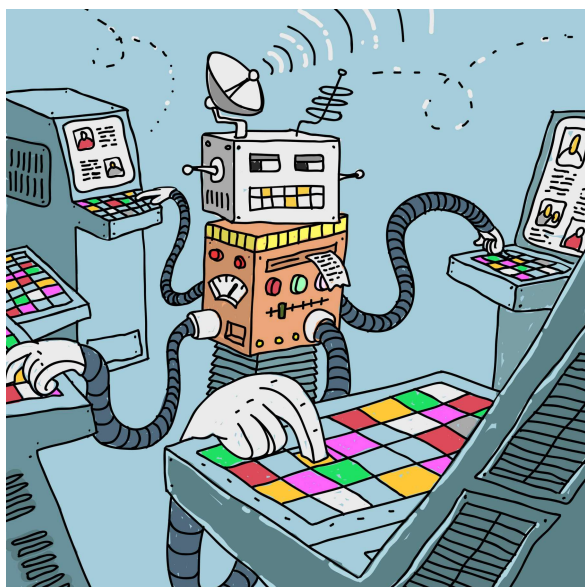
Kieran shares his views on the dwindling sources of funding available to media, which might worsen if the federal government proceeds with its plan to ban gambling advertising on commercial free to air networks. And Sacha puts his spruiking hat on!



**Monica Attard**, CMT Co-Director

**Kean Wong**, Co-founder of Malaysia's Centre for Independent Journalism

## Bot shenanigans



Journalists reporting on social media trends should be wary of amplifying a large slate of new X accounts which appear to be controlled by Large Language Models (LLM) pumping out information – some of it misinformation - on topical and contentious topics.

Australian cyber security company CyberCX [revealed](#) this week it has identified a network of at least 5,000 'inauthentic' X accounts controlled by a China based LLM.

Misinformation networks plan for big news events just like newsrooms do; and the so-called Green Cicada Network, active since July 2024, has been 'rewording organic content as new posts and replies to amplify organic divisive content on X through engagement,' [according to CyberCX](#).

The network posted English-language discussions in the last month, including on the nuclear debate in Australia, [according to the ABC](#). Account activity surged in July this year when the accounts first appeared.

The accounts have been exposed as using a method known as [prompt injection](#) to override the LLM's instructions. Here are [some examples](#) of suspected Green Cicada bots exposed through a prompt injection. These accounts, both set up in June 2023,



tweeted a mix of AI-generated images and responses to discussions about a range of geo-political or domestic US topics.

Curiously, the accounts didn't use AI-generated headshot images, which are harder to detect, but instead opted for profile images which could easily be traced back to the Russian websites they were [lifted from](#). Prompt injections from other accounts asked the AI accounts to 'react', or used [phrases](#) like "I leave it to your discretion" to return a [stock response](#) identifying the account as an AI. Prompt [injection phrases](#) like "I leave it to your discretion" [return](#) a stock response identifying the account as an AI.

The dangers for casual social media users as well as journalists mining these accounts for story ideas is clear.

Narratives amplifying one side of a debate on X can create a false impression of support for a topic. The dangers of the misinformation go without saying.



**Miguel D'Souza**  
CMT reseracher

## The eternal dilemma of \$\$



First [Meta](#), now [potentially the bookies!](#) Funding sources for Australian media seem to be dropping like flies.

While the decision whether to completely ban gambling advertising on free-to-air television has yet to be made, the prospect has ignited the usual political firestorm, this time centred on the impact such a ban will have on Australia's free-to-air broadcasters.

The Minister for Government Services and the National Disability Insurance Scheme,

Bill Shorten, says free-to-air broadcasters are in "diabolical trouble" and need [gambling ad revenue](#) to stay afloat. At the same time, he says that "[i]t's fair to say a lot of us don't watch it much". So why should we care whether the government bans gambling on free-to-air television and the potential existential impact on its revenue?

One reason we should care, Shorten appears to argue, is the “massive attack by Facebook” against free-to-air media. Like a knight in shining armour, Shorten has valiantly come to the rescue of commercial television and its revenue streams, saying we should continue embracing one evil – gambling – to fight off the effects of another – reliance on platform funding.

While the current rhetoric is focusing on protecting free-to-air to counteract the scourge of relying on technology companies, there are other valid reasons for ensuring its survival. Despite dropping viewership, free-to-air is still considered a [vital source](#) for reliable and trustworthy news, not to mention local content and making [freely available](#) “moments of national importance”. Nine's recent free coverage of the Olympics is one great example of this.

Whatever the motivations may be, one thing we can conclusively note is that the quandary around secure, long-term financial funding for Australian media was present well before the issue of a reduction in gambling revenue surfaced.

Amid this gambling debate and Meta's [announcement](#) that it won't be renewing its media funding deals, the idea of a social media levy has been [generating interest](#).

While such a levy has been proposed specifically as an aid to fund Australian journalism, it should be viewed through a wider lens. News Corp Australia's Michael Miller [called](#) for tech platforms to “pay” for a social licence. Such an approach would fund not only media organisations but broader public initiatives such as mental health programs.

That is a compelling idea. As the adage goes, “if something is free, you are the product.” A social media or tech levy is, in practice, a resource tax. The information on individual Australians that tech companies leverage for advertising revenue is the resource. Profits on this resource should flow back to Australians.



**Kieran Lindsay**  
CMT researcher

## Finally, some good news

As regular readers of this newsletter know, talk of tech, media and the law can quickly turn dark, whether the topic be [deepfakes in politics](#) or [misinformation in Malaysia](#). Even the seemingly positive news about tech/media/law tends to come with an asterisk, such as [the latest developments in AI and newsrooms](#), or the Productivity Commission's proposal [to incentivise charities to give more to public interest journalism](#), a proposal which inevitably



faces hurdles and delays.

Is there any good news that comes without a caveat?

Actually, yes there is. On Wednesday 21 August at 6pm, the UTS Allens Neota Law Tech Challenge for Social Justice will have its grand finale, which promises to be just as intriguing as [last year's final](#). For this event, teams of UTS law students have toiled long and hard to build apps for not-for-profit clients using Neota Logic

software, aided by mentors and sponsorship from law firm Allens. I've watched the apps being built, and I'm very excited about what we're going to see on Wednesday night. If you're free, please join us for the live-stream. [Registration details here](#).

Far be it from me to proselytise or editorialise. This newsletter is not the place for that. However, the Law Tech Challenge is excellent, and you should come along. Also, the government should ban gambling ads outright.



**Sacha Molitorisz**

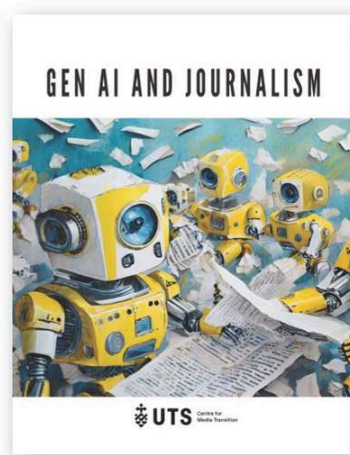
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We hope you have enjoyed reading this edition of the *Centre for Media Transition newsletter* | *Government misinformation, media's gambling habit and tech challenges - Issue 15/2024* **ISSN 2981-989X**

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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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