

Hi there

Academia in session



It's conference season in the academic world!

On Monday, Sacha led a great interdisciplinary session at the Australian Law Academic Association's [conference](#) hosted by UTS and University of Sydney. Later in the week, Sacha, Chrisanthi, Monica, Esther and I all participated in the Australian and New Zealand Communications Association's conference – [Communication, Authority and Power](#) – hosted by University of Melbourne. Below,

we describe the content of our presentations to ANZCA.

I also participated in a defamation conference organised by ANU Law, [The Changing Landscape](#). This worthwhile event had a short but very impressive line-up of speakers including barristers Sue Chrysanthou and Matt Collins, and academics Jelena Gligorijevic from ANU and Michael Douglas from University of Western Australia. But I came away a little dejected.

Several speakers were less than enthusiastic about the ways in which the amendments were drafted. In particular, there was scepticism about the likelihood of the new public interest defence for journalism having any meaningful impact. Another observation was that the serious harm test, while it may have some effect in blocking or at least

discouraging 'backyard' defamation disputes, would likely have little application to the media because the very nature of mass media distribution, especially online, is likely to make almost any imputation 'serious'.

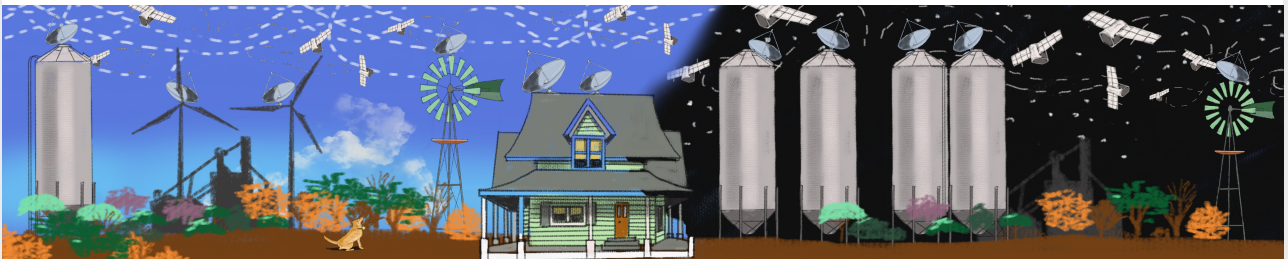
More encouraging, though, was the presentation from Sue Gratton of the Law Commission of Ontario. A new report, [Defamation Law in the Internet Age](#), proposes a take-down scheme for digital platforms that aims to keep these disputes away from the law of defamation. This is an idea we're keen on at CMT and we'll come back to the topic before long.

In the meantime, read on for our ANZCA observations and for some exciting news from Monica about our new project on regional media. Finally, Esther shares the latest monitoring from First Draft on misinformation narratives on vaccines.



Derek Wilding
CMT Co-Director

Rural and regional reporting



We're delighted to announce that CMT has received a grant from the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation to look at the conditions currently challenging rural and regional media. The grant means we'll be collaborating with Guardian Australia which will see the online newspaper build a regional reporting network whilst CMT examines the barriers to deeper reportage of regional issues and whether mainstream media can increase its coverage of Australia's regions without philanthropic support.

The project will see five UTS journalism graduates over 3 years embedded by Guardian Australia in communities far from home and have their reportage viewed by large national and international audiences. CMT will be producing an annual Rural and Regional Media Report in which we will deliver a 'state of play'. We'll also look for models which will, hopefully, encourage more mainstream media to source long form investigative



reporting as well as news, to ensure the regions are more fully factored into our political and economic debates.

We are grateful to VFFF (especially Grants Director Claire Mannion and CEO Jenny Wheatley) for supporting this important initiative and we look forward to working with the Foundation and Guardian Australia over the next three years to make a difference to the future of rural and regional reporting.



Monica Attard
CMT Co-Director

Social qualities



At the Centre for Media Transition we are constantly searching for ideas where regulation and journalism best practice can intersect to produce a better information ecosystem. One issue that we've identified recently is lack of policy acknowledgment of the importance of quality public interest journalism. Should poor quality or partial journalism which happens to discuss issues of public interest be treated the same as accurate, complex, local, diverse and impartial journalism? One obvious way to focus on quality is to strengthen

standards, but this hasn't happened. On the contrary the News Media Bargaining Code signals a weakening of standards as internal codes are treated the same as independent industry-wide schemes.

Another, more innovative and potentially controversial way to reward quality is to apply social utility metrics to journalism and reward organisations that can account for their higher social value. This can be done via [social accounting](#) mechanisms. I'll be presenting this idea, on behalf of Derek, Sacha and myself, to the ANZCA conference on Friday afternoon, probably at the same time as you're reading this. We'll see how it is received!



Chrisanthi Giotis
Postdoctoral Fellow

Algorithmic transparency to combat choice overload

Algorithms limit choices, which can be both bad and good. When search results and social media feeds are full of promoted and irrelevant content, algorithms seem to be working against me, not for me. At other times, however, algorithms seem to enhance my autonomy by limiting my choices. This includes by combating 'choice overload', a phrase used by psychologists to describe the problem of having too many choices, which can lead to choice paralysis, bad choices, and general dissatisfaction.



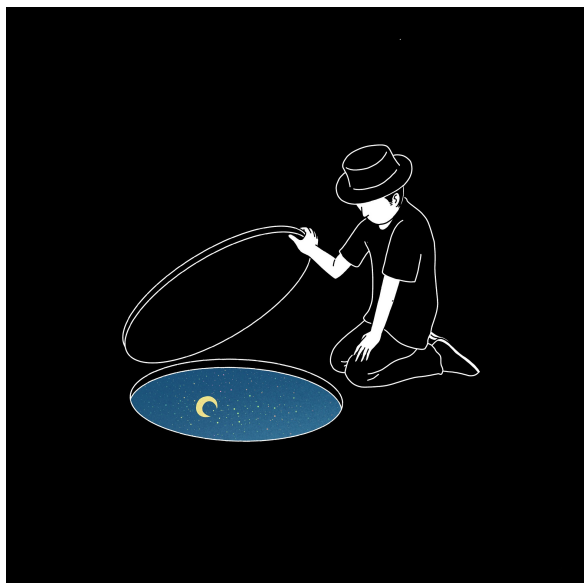
Amid the flurry of sessions at ANZCA this week, one panel on Thursday was devoted to the news audience. It featured: postgraduate researcher Hanyu Du comparing the news habits of Gen Y and Gen Z; Axel Bruns (who this week received a [Laureate Fellowship](#) for an ambitious project into partisanship and polarisation) revealing 10 years of data about engagement with The Conversation; and [Tanya Notley](#) discussing her important research into media literacy.

In the same session, I presented a paper on how choice overload applies to news media. It's a major problem, I argued, but the solution is certainly not to cut back on journalism and thereby offer fewer choices. On the contrary, we need more media diversity and more public interest journalism. But we do need to develop and deploy strategies that enable news consumers to navigate their way through a labyrinthine digital news landscape. And one key strategy is sure to be [algorithmic transparency](#), to help ensure that our choices are being limited to our benefit, and not to our detriment.



Sacha Molitorisz
UTS Lecturer in Law/FASS

Media pluralism - policy options



I was part of a panel dedicated to the joint UTS-University of Sydney [Media Pluralism Project](#) including my fellow researchers, Tim Dwyer, Saba Bebawi and Jonathon Hutchison. We're in the final stages of the project where we need to develop some suggestions on how Australian policy and regulation might adapt to the contemporary environment. We're working with two core elements.

The first element is the introduction of a public interest test for media mergers and acquisitions that goes beyond the competition test applied by the ACCC. We're guided here by the UK approach that includes a test of 'sufficient plurality' - not that we think this is the right formulation for Australia, but the point is that it can be applied by both the media regulator (Ofcom) as well as the competition regulator.

The other element we're looking at is a measurement framework for media plurality. Until last year, the UK was leading the field here as well, but then the Australian Competition and Media Authority released its [News Measurement Framework](#). What's really interesting about this proposal is the way it brings localism into the same framework as plurality. We're working with this model now, and it's good to see how a tool we've developed to identify public affairs content could be utilised in the application of the ACMA model.

We're also looking at how the concept of quality might be a part of this framework. As Chrisanthi explained above, it's an element that we at CMT think was missing from the News Media Bargaining Code. We'll share more on this topic as our thinking develops.



Derek Wilding
CMT Co-Director

Innoculating people against vaccine misinformation

As the highly contagious [Delta variant](#) sparked a weeks-long lockdown in Sydney and fresh restrictions in several states and territories, Prime Minister Scott Morrison [lifted](#) an apparent cap on the AstraZeneca shot last week and encouraged all adults under the age of 40 to speak to their GP about getting the shot. However, inconsistencies between advice from the federal government and that from various [state](#) leaders as well as the nation's [top vaccine advice body](#) — which has advised against the vaccine because of reports of related rare blood clots — set off a ripple of misinformation and conspiracy theories about the Covid-19 vaccines in the Australian online sphere.



First Draft's monitoring of vaccine-related online narratives both in Australia and [elsewhere in the world](#) found skepticism and conspiracy theories about Covid-19 and the vaccines were rife in the encrypted message app Telegram following the Prime Minister's announcement. For instance, this [post](#) accused the Australian government of being 'over run by dirty paedophiles' who used the Delta strain as an excuse to restrict movement and force their 'poison death jabs' on people. A [few](#) other [posts](#) referenced a misleading [video](#) by Ivor Cummins, an Irish wellness influencer who — as previously [reported](#) by First Draft — has regularly shared [false claims](#) about the pandemic. Cummins said the Delta variant is not deadly and rather a 'political scariant' to 'take away your freedom' since there wasn't a corresponding increase in [hospitalisation rate](#) in the [UK](#), but he failed to take into account the vaccination rate and how effective the vaccines have been in protecting people against Covid-19.

Another false claim circulating on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) following the Prime Minister's announcement inaccurately stated that the AstraZeneca vaccine is not recognised in the US and therefore people who have had the shot will not be allowed to enter the country. The claim is false because currently people who wish to visit the US are [not required to be vaccinated](#) and only need to provide a [negative test result](#). Even if the US changed its entry rules to only allow visits from vaccinated people, the [CDC](#) acknowledges vaccines that are not approved in the US but have been authorized for emergency use by the WHO, such as the AstraZeneca vaccine.

At First Draft we believe prevention, not cure, may be a more effective way to combat

misinformation and we offer a range of [resources](#) for reporters, researchers, policymakers and communication specialists to help [inoculate people against health and vaccine misinformation](#).



Esther Chan
First Draft Bureau Editor

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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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