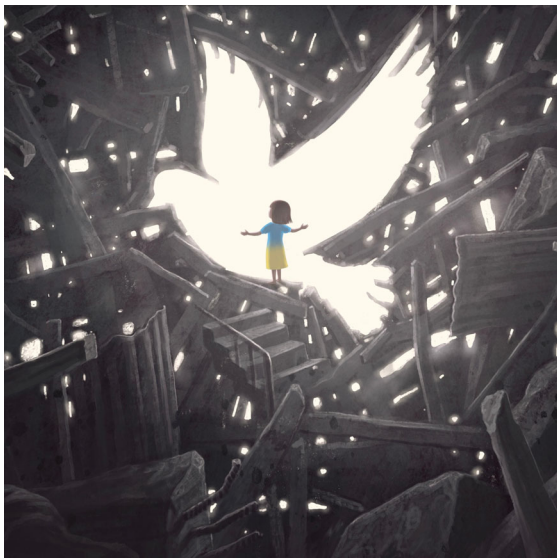


Hi there

A day to remember



Today is Remembrance Day, marking the end of World War I in 1918. The minute's silence at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month commemorates the sacrifices made by the fallen, attesting to the horrors of war and the fragility of peace. Today, then, is a fitting day for CMT postdoctoral research fellow Ayesha Jehangir to reflect on the types of journalism that fan the flames of war.

Also in today's newsletter, Monica Attard tackles Twitter, which has erupted into outrage since Elon Musk took over. He wants speech to be as free as a bird. But then he started banning accounts. And then [started charging verified users \\$8 per month](#). Literally and figuratively, free speech has its limits on Twitter. Unfortunately, the limits of hate speech are being stretched. 'Hate speech skyrocketed when Musk acquired Twitter,' writes QUT academic [Tim Graham, after crunching the data](#). From a free speech perspective, it's heartening at least that Graham was able to post his findings on Twitter.

Below you'll also find Monica unveiling our ambitious new report into the state of regional news in Australia and Esther Chan reflecting on last week's TechCamp event, at which CMT hosted journalists from Kiribati, Fiji, Vanuatu and many more Pacific nations, all learning from one another how to counter misinformation and do journalism more ethically. It was uplifting and enriching – and, of course, entirely pacific.



Sacha Molitorisz
Senior Lecturer, UTS Law

Vital reporting from the regions



After a year of immersion in regional news, we're delighted to release the first of our three reports into [the state of Regional Media in Australia](#).

In 2022, the CMT received a grant from the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation to examine whether metropolitan news outlets engage with regional news content and whether it might be commercially viable for them to invest in its production. The report contains key findings from our first year of research, including:



- There are mixed levels of coverage of regional Australia in metro media. Among newspapers, News Corp's *The Daily Telegraph* is significantly ahead of either *Guardian Australia* or the Nine News Group's *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Among broadcast outlets, Nine News produces more regional coverage than either the ABC or the Seven Network.
- Coverage is overwhelmingly responsive to external events rather than reportage initiated within newsrooms. This was evident too in regional news coverage during the 2022 federal election, which may indicate a marginalisation of local issues, resourcing challenges or that models premised on local-to-national editorial drivers are less efficient during election campaigns.
- There is a fact checking role for a healthy regional news ecosystem to play in ensuring the integrity of information used by metro-based outlets, which often rely

on local publications as a source for information. Without well-resourced regional media, interpretations of information can go unchecked.

We partnered with *Guardian Australia*, which is [building a rural reporting network](#) during the three-year life of the project, aided by freelance journalists and five UTS journalism graduates embedded in regional locations. We hope you read our report on issues that have major significance for the whole country - and please send feedback to cmt@uts.edu.au



Monica Attard
CMT Co-Director

News media goes over the top



Constructing a dominant media narrative of military and nonmilitary conflicts can provide a country with bargaining leverage over the 'enemy' state. A classic example is the ongoing US-China 'tech war', where the global media narrative is dominated by the US side of the story, in which China's access to advanced microchips [to build state-of-the-art weapons](#) is depicted as a major 'threat' to US national security.

The broader coverage of US President Biden's new and more aggressive tech sanctions on China is indicative of mainstream media's 'war framing', especially adopted by partisan media. This includes stories such as: '[Time to ditch communist China's technology, or else](#)', in which an already [politically polarised American public](#) is warned about their 'dependence on hostile nations'; '[China's "fun" with trade sanctions is "biting them where it hurts"](#)', where the audience is reminded that 'China has brought this upon itself'; and '[Joe Biden crushes Xi Jinping's precious semiconductor ambitions](#)'.

News framing that accentuates how governments see technology research and development as a key national security issue contributes to the moral panic around the technological advancement of other countries, in this case China, and is used by governments, in this case the US, to legitimise the expansion of their military budget. Such discourses shape the dynamics of the dispute and what the general public thinks and feels about it.

Meanwhile, China's narrative is broadly missing from global media for two likely reasons.

First, the Communist Party is very sensitive about the 'opinion' of its people. For China's Communist Party, keeping its citizens close, by will or by force, is crucial to its political power. This includes limiting their access to global news and vice versa. Second, the overwhelmingly patriotic US news media are often not allowing China's narrative to percolate into mainstream public debate, thus serving as government propaganda to achieve a 'victory' for the home country. Both factors have significantly contributed to Western media's war-oriented framing of the issue in recent years, which presents Beijing's '[audacious propaganda campaign](#)', even as it diverts the public from the actual motivation of economic and technological supremacy and the crippling subordination of a rival.



Ayesha Jehangir
CMT Postdoctoral Fellow

TechCamp Australia



Last week, in an ambitious feat of scheduling and logistics, the CMT brought 30 journalists from the Pacific region to Sydney for a 'TechCamp' sponsored by the US State Department.

Delegates from Kiribati, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Cook Islands and Solomon Islands - as well as Australia and New Zealand - threw themselves into a big challenge: exploring whether it is possible to engineer ethical journalism. Our focus was on information

disorder, encompassing mis- and dis-information and everything in between. Participants chose between workshops on verification, fact-checking, using data to fight disinformation, mobile journalism and community engagement, all conducted by trainers who are experts in their fields. We used brainstorming sessions to identify the major challenges newsrooms are facing, and more importantly, identify the root causes.

Several key concerns related to disinformation came up repeatedly, regardless of the country where the journalists came from and whether the concerns were tied to specific threats such as the climate crisis or events such as the upcoming election in Fiji. These concerns relate to the journalists' ability to sift through the noise on social media, debunk false or inaccurate information, improve their own media literacy and at the same time educate their audience.

My group came up with two strategies to combat these challenges, including a Slack community called 'Tip Hub', where TechCamp participants can share tips, discuss stories, and alert each other to disinformation. This exclusive community will initially consist of TechCamp participants since it builds on the trust shared by people who know each other. The second project is a fun #FactCheckFriday TikTok hashtag, where journalists from different newsrooms can make engaging short videos debunking disinformation each week. The idea behind the hashtag is to give audiences a better understanding of how fact-checking is done, and while watching these TikTok videos also build their awareness to verify content they come across online.

These low-barrier strategies rely upon readily-available technologies and can be applied to any country. In a time of constant disinformation, they gave our TechCamp participants something practical to implement right away.



Esther Chan
CMT Research Fellow

Mastodon is trending on Twitter



In a week like no other for Twitter, the old news is that the world's richest man, the billionaire owner of the Tesla electric car company, has bought the blue bird for a lot more than even he thought it was worth, at AU\$69b. Since then, it's been a chaotic and distressing time for the platform's staff and its users.

A free speech absolutist, Elon Musk wants to turn Twitter into a public square, which is what its users might say it has been since its inception (albeit a privately-owned public

square). But the new owner of the public square wants people to pay for the right to free speech. Musk's critics say he bought the platform to lower moderation standards and allow those kicked off the site – such as Donald Trump over his support for the January 6 Washington insurrection – back on.

It's early days: Musk's management of his newest toy might settle down and Twitter might do what it's so far failed to do in its 16 years – hit on a business model that delivers reliable profit. Musk, however, is wasting no time in shaking things up on the road to finding profitability. He's laid off thousands of employees, via email, in its government

relations, ethics, communications, marketing and news curation divisions globally, [saying there was no choice](#) with Twitter losing \$4m a day. But now, having realised they do rather important work, [he's been asking some of them back](#).

He moved quickly to force tweeps impersonating those more famous (or infamous) to tag their accounts as 'parody', [and banned comedian Kathy Griffin](#) for her parody Musk account. He also announced the much-coveted blue tick of verification distinguishing verified users from impersonators will soon be up for sale, which could allow impersonators to buy identities in order to spread misinformation. Although Musk has delayed this move until after this week's US mid-term elections, he's flagged that if the 423,000 verified tweeps don't pay up, their tweets will be algorithmically downgraded and less visible.

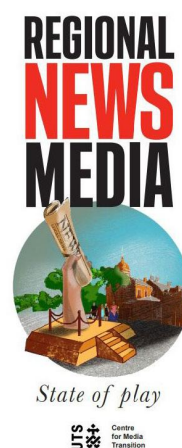
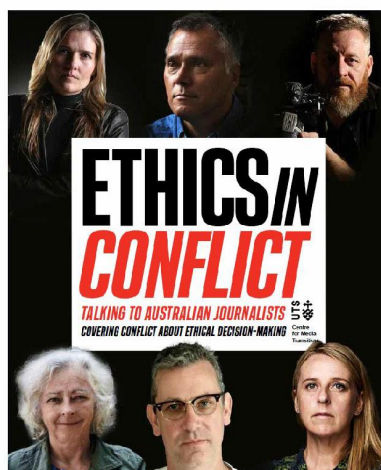
Given Musk's commitment to free speech (at least for blue tick buyers), he's concerned the platform's moderation policy excludes too many views. This caused panic that the platform would become even more of a cesspool than it currently is, causing Twitter's global head of safety and integrity [Yoel Roth to tweet](#) that only 15% of his division had been impacted by the layoffs, 'with front line moderation staff experiencing the least impact'.

It's impossible to know how many of Twitter's 238 million daily users might be spooked enough to want to leave the platform, but already there's been a flood of new users [on alternative services such as Mastodon](#). Should Twitter become a refuge for far-right conspiracy theories, as many fear, advertisers will presumably be looking for the exit door too. Indeed, [many have already left](#).



Monica Attard
CMT Co-Director

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.*



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