

Hi there

## When nobody believes anything



In June last year, *Crikey* published a story calling the Murdoch family 'unindicted co-conspirators' in the January 6 2021 US insurrection. In August, Lachlan Murdoch [sued for defamation](#). This morning, Murdoch [dropped that lawsuit](#), after Fox News paid US\$787m to settle a separate defamation lawsuit in the US. At issue in both cases were fundamental questions concerning the nature of truth, and the danger of lies.

Philosopher Hannah Arendt believed that a populace bombarded with lies was vulnerable to totalitarianism. 'If everybody always lies to you, the consequence is not that you believe the lies, but rather that nobody believes anything any longer,' Arendt wrote. 'And a people that no longer can believe anything cannot make up its mind. It is deprived not only of its capacity to act but also of its capacity to think and to judge. And with such a people you can then do what you please.'

As lies proliferate in our public sphere, the pursuit of truth is the theme of today's newsletter. Tim Koskie questions the motivations of Elon Musk slapping the Twitter accounts of the ABC and SBS with the label, 'government-funded media'. Will this deliver transparency and honesty? Or something darker? Liz Giuffre reveals her research into one of Sydney's former cultural hubs, the Hopetoun Hotel, which aims to ensure that its history is told by all those involved, not just the boys in the bands. Michael Davis reflects on Google calling for the regulation of AI, which is having issues with 'hallucinations'. And finally I draw a link from these AI hallucinations to Fox's out-of-court settlement with Dominion Voting Systems for falsehoods spread during the 2020 US election.

If your vote is for truth, honesty and accuracy, read on.



**Sacha Molitorisz**  
Senior Lecturer, UTS Law

## Read the label (at your peril)



Twitter continues to be re-envisioned by its [pronatalist owner](#) Elon Musk. This week the label 'government-funded media' appeared on the [accounts of the ABC and SBS](#). A few days earlier in the US the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR) [quit Twitter](#) after their accounts were similarly labelled 'government-funded media'.

One reason why this label chafes is because it's true. The ABC and SBS *are* government-funded. And while the ABC is

Australia's most trusted [news source](#), the ways it is funded and managed open [the potential for political interference](#). In the context of Australia's [highly concentrated](#) media ownership, this leaves Australians susceptible to a polarised and politically parallel [media landscape](#).

However, this label misses such crucial nuance on the issue that it implicates Twitter itself as a source of undue influence. For media watchers, the key concern is whether news organisations use their disproportionate influence to barrack for the causes and cohorts of [their choosing](#), and whether media moguls are acting as kingmakers. Yet those media organisations with extensive ties to political parties and whose ranks include former members of parliament receive no indicative label. Further, the ABC and SBS [have robust charters and guidance](#) that commit them to take an impartial stance. The same is not always true for private news organisations.

What's more, flagging government funding and vulnerability to interference is a very different concern for a [relatively robust democracy](#) such as Australia than for authoritarian regimes. There is little to distinguish the labels for the ABC and SBS from those for [Russian and Chinese media](#), even though the government influence on these sites is not just potential but [active](#) and [easily identifiable](#).

There are many reasons to be leery of the news we find online – a problem made worse

by the flood of AI-generated churnalism on the [horizon](#). The question is: are these labels illuminating? Or are they merely fodder for Elon Musk's [conspiratorially-inclined fan base](#) and the authoritarian governments he is [accommodating](#)?



**Tim Koskie**  
CMT Researcher

## Writing the record on music journalism



Music and arts journalists work quickly, often under-resourced, underpaid and underslept. We write the first drafts of cultural history, knowing a misquote might not start a political battle, but could still ripple through the attention economy. Even now, in the hyper-curated (or AI-curated) world of online music and arts journalism, audiences still rely on a trusted eye or ear to cut through to the good stuff. But how do we ensure a diversity of representation when talking about music and journalism and its influence?

Dr Gregory Ferris and I are currently working on [a large-scale research project](#) for the Powerhouse Museum called 'Spirits of the Hoey'. Using the iconic Sydney music venue The Hopetoun Hotel as our focus, we're reconsidering how music and arts culture in Sydney developed and has persisted over time, and the first (and often only) drafts of history that music and arts journalism provided are essential to that work. The Hoey was home to little acts who would become legends – Paul Kelly, the Hoodoo Gurus, Weddings Parties Anything – a great, male-dominated bunch, according to current histories.

So far we've spoken to artists, punters, managers and bookers – including CMT's own Sacha Molitorisz, whose 2009 [obituary of the venue](#) is the stuff of legend. Working backwards from recently published reissues, memoirs and testimonies, one could easily assume that the scene was the exclusive domain of white male rock gods. However, just a small amount of archival work from the time shows a much broader media and musical landscape. The invaluable archive is music and arts press.

An important voice for our project is Tracee Hutchison, whose trip from Melbourne to Sydney was sponsored by the Centre for Media Transition. A writer, broadcaster, presenter and producer – a multiplatform journalist well before smartphones and social media - [Tracee's eye-opening contribution to our project](#) means a fuller representation of

the music and community culture at the time, as well as a reminder of the importance of diversity in journalism practice for current and future practitioners. Got to see it to be it, right?

Tracee pointed us towards Margaret Cott, the founding editor and publisher of *Drum Media*, and *Kathy Bail*, the first female editor of Australian *Rolling Stone*, as well as reminding us that music journalism was, in a golden era of Oz Rock, actually championed by the work of excellent female journalists. As she says, 'For all the maleness going on on-stage, it was the women that were actually very much the powerhouses of the music media scene at that time.'

If we're really going to understand how music journalism influences culture, we need to make sure we're capturing as many practitioners and perspectives as possible.



**Liz Giuffre**

Senior Lecturer, UTS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

## Look! It writes bad poetry!



On Sunday, the US show *60 Minutes* featured [an interview](#) with Google CEO Sundar Pichai on the social implications of AI. Asked whether we're prepared for what's coming, Pichai said, 'On one hand I feel, no, because ... the pace at which we can think and adapt as societal institutions, compared to the pace at which the technology's evolving, there seems to be a mismatch.' This mismatch is known as the Collingridge dilemma after English philosopher David Collingridge, who explored it in his 1980 book, *The Social Control of Technology*. The problem is that

negative effects often emerge only after the technology has become pervasive. Pichai followed up by saying, 'On the other hand, compared to any other technology, I've seen more people worried about it earlier in its life cycle. So I feel optimistic.'

Pichai's not alone in his optimism, but he's probably in the minority. People have been worrying about AI – and specifically about machines becoming sentient – ever since computers were invented. A Google employee was [famously let go](#) last year for suggesting that moment had already arrived. Whether it will ever come, it's [not yet here](#), despite [the noise and the hype](#) around large language models such as ChatGPT.

(Look! It writes bad poetry!) But calling out the hype doesn't mean there's nothing to worry about. There really is, just on a more prosaic level. Despite even their creators not understanding fully how they work, competition among the tech giants has seen one after another released into an unready world. Google has its own chatbot, Bard, which hallucinates just as floridly as ChatGPT. And the consequences for online misinformation are deeply concerning. As Pichai says, 'No one ... in the field has yet solved the hallucination problems. All models do have this as an issue.'

*60 Minutes* also interviewed Demis Hassabis, CEO of Google subsidiary Deepmind Technologies. He says that humans are, 'an infinitely adaptable species. You know, you look at today, us using all of our smartphones and other devices, and we effortlessly sort of adapt to these new technologies. And this is gonna be another one of those changes.' It's a limited view of adaptation, ignoring the raft of social problems created by smartphones and social media. It seems a stretch to call our incipient attempts to address these problems 'effortless'.

Pichai says regulation is needed: how to deal with the social consequences of AI is 'not for a company to decide.' But when the EU's [draft AI Act](#) was released in 2021, Google was [not completely supportive](#). And [there are doubts](#) about whether the proposed Act deals adequately with this generation of chatbots. Now, Pichai suggests we need global governance similar to international nuclear treaties. I have doubts about how this would work, but one thing is clear: Australia also needs to take regulatory steps to address this problem, and soon.



**Michael Davis**  
CMT Research Fellow

## When AI becomes A Lie



Apparently AI has 'hallucinations'. Funny, right?

Hardly. Ethics is full of grey areas, but one of the dependable certainties is that lying, deceiving and misleading are wrong. Sure, you can lie to save a life. You can lie in the service of a collective fantasy such as a sleigh drawn by flying reindeer. But these exceptions are rare, because truth matters. Truth is how we build trust. It's the foundation of our relationships, and our society.

Unfortunately, AI doesn't care. It mixes bogus with bona fide, spitting out text in which truth and untruth mingle, so the two are impossible to distinguish. One small example: at the CMT, PhD candidate Christopher Hall is researching 'platform journalism'. Keen to see what generative AI might say on the topic, he asked ChatGPT to suggest three 'reputable sources', which it duly did.

'The only problem was that they were all fake,' [Chris writes](#). One of the sources ChatGPT recommended was a *Guardian* article from 2015 called, 'The Rise of Platform Journalism.' There is no such article at the *Guardian*. There is a piece under that headline, as it happens, but it appeared in 2022. [In this newsletter](#). Written by Chris.

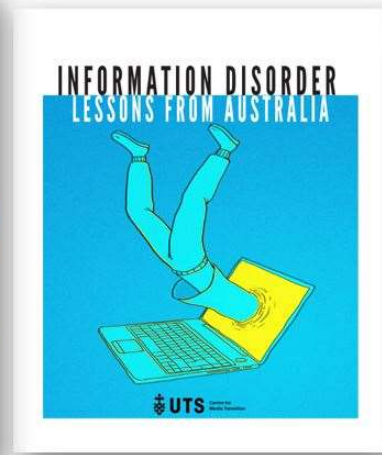
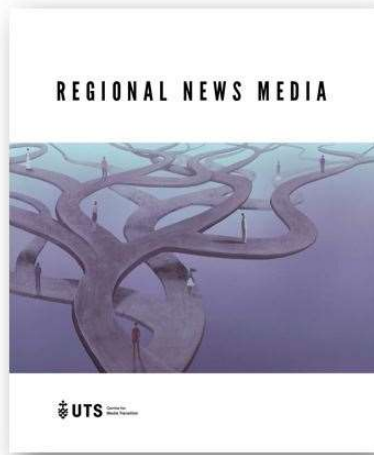
Flagrant falsehoods? That brings us logically to Fox News. This week Fox took a US\$787m hit after it was sued for spreading false claims that the 2020 US presidential election was rigged. In [a last-minute out-of-court settlement](#), Fox capitulated in the defamation lawsuit brought by the voting machine company, Dominion. Further lawsuits are in the works. As Dominion's lawyers said outside the Delaware courthouse, 'The truth matters. Lies have consequences.' And today, acknowledging the Dominion result, [Lachlan Murdoch dropped his lawsuit](#) against Crikey, who have so far raised more than \$588,000 via crowdfunding to cover legal costs. [Their Gofundme page](#) says that any surplus funds raised will go to the [Alliance for Journalists' Freedom](#), who are campaigning for a [Media Freedom Act](#).

For anyone who aspires to work under the tag 'journalist', accuracy is a core tenet of good practice, embedded in the codes of conduct of the MEAA, the ABC, the Commercial TV industry, among many others. And accuracy should be a core tenet for AI developers too. After all, we're not really talking about 'hallucinations'. As [Carl T. Bergstrom and C. Brandon Ogbunu write](#), 'When AI chatbots flood the world with false facts, confidently asserted, they're not breaking down, glitching out, or hallucinating. No, they're bullshitting.' That BS needs to be called out and weeded out, no matter which form of media that's spreading it. And the companies responsible must to be held to account, just as Fox News was.



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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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