



ALLIANCE *for*
JOURNALISTS'
FREEDOM

What is the future of media and, most importantly, our democracy?



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FUTURE OF JOURNALISM

The Alliance for Journalists Freedom has recognised that many existing policies and measures to support journalism focus on the past, trying to save large legacy media by compensating them for the loss of traditional revenues.

We believe there is a lack of clear vision of what the future looks like for the industry in 10 years out, and crucially, what kind of media we actually need for a healthier and stronger democracy.

Such a vision is important for adopting policies and laws to support public interest journalism in Australia that is accessible and represents the country's diverse communities regardless of whether they live in cities or rural areas.

Our Future of Journalism project investigates trends likely to shape Australian journalism in 2035 and beyond.

Why it matters

Since the digital revolution started challenging old business models more than two decades ago, media companies have either gone broke or significantly downsized; social media platforms have grown into global tech behemoths; new forms of journalism have emerged; nobody seems to have worked out how to make a profit while producing journalism that serves its public interest purpose; and public trust in media has been in decline around the world.

- In what could have been a revolutionary act, the News Bargaining Code (enacted into law in 2021) forced “the culprits”—Google and Facebook—to pay for the news they distribute on their platforms. But rather than using the money to fuel innovation and support independent public interest journalism, the scheme channelled undisclosed sums to the big Australian publishers.
- Furthermore, last year, over half of the government’s \$50-million Public Interest News Gathering program for regional publishers went to four large media companies[1].
- There is no protection for press freedom enshrined in the Australian Constitution, and therefore it is often taken for granted. However, in one of the most concentrated media markets in the world, Australian media is often accused of serving political interests[2], and not reflecting the diversity of the nation[3]. In addition, journalism comes under a variety of legal pressures — from defamation lawsuits to national security laws
- Six in ten Australians don’t trust the media or government[4] seeing them as misleading and divisive institutions.

We present the key takeaways from 18 interviews with newsroom editors, media strategists and researchers that were released between November 2020 and December 2021. You can watch the interview on AJF's YouTube channel.

Digital natives as the core audience



We already see a generation under 30 that doesn't engage with legacy media brands. The loyalty is falling away, and with it, will go the revenues."



Piers Grove, publisher of social-first news service for youth, Daily Aus, and Managing Director of Scout Publishing

Watch his interview <https://youtu.be/AKr9hL5SWR8>

By 2035, anyone under the age of 40 will not remember a world without smartphones, social media, and streaming services[5]. The older audiences will be aging Millennials, who were the first generation to grow up in the internet age.

As of 2021, smartphones were a primary device for young Australians to access the internet (97%) [6]. People under 34 use social media as their primary source of news (56%)[7],[8], followed by websites and news apps. An overwhelming majority pays for at least one entertainment subscription (95% among Gen Z; 93% among Millennials.)[9] Gen Z uses social media not only for entertainment or passive consumption of news but to express their political views and tell their own stories.[10]

What it means: Traditional media—newspapers and broadcast radio and television—will lose a large bulk of their audiences. We are looking at the demographics that will have never watched evening news on TV or read a newspaper.

The end of scheduling

"Much of the traffic comes from search and social, and audiences don't make appointments with websites like they did with newspapers and TV programs."



Jim Kennedy, head of Strategy and Enterprise Development of the Associated Press

Watch his interview <https://youtu.be/FVx8cxseGeA>

"Make the content valuable for digital audiences. We [ABC] opened up a new whole pathway to demographics that will never watch TV and radio but coming to the same stories on digital platforms."



Gaven Morris, former Director of News, Analysis, and Investigations at ABC

Watch his interview <https://youtu.be/yiHzZ1Dvbck>

Traditional scheduling of broadcast TV news and radio programs will be at an end. Consumers will access their news where and when they want it on their own devices. Personalised and on-demand experiences will drive the strategy of media companies.

What it means: Media companies will have to adapt to changing viewing, reading, and listening habits of their audiences and deliver their products tailored to individual consumers through algorithms and first-party data. They will have to do a lot of focused outreach, engage with their audiences and really get to know them better.

Fragmentation of news environment

"We will see a lot of experimentation. Now, more than ever, we have all the tools to create a media company from scratch for free, or almost for free."



Alan Soon, CEO of Singapore-based Splice Media

Watch his interview <https://youtu.be/xwll0zUvRV0>

"New players will take over the space. Big incumbent [media] have a big struggle ahead of them. They'll do it through acquisition rather than transformation."



Piers Grove, publisher of social-first news service for youth, Daily Aus, and Managing Director of Scout Publishing

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"If there's nobody to hold [local governments] accountable because all the media is located in some centre that has a completely different view of the world and has no ideas about your lived experiences, why would you trust media on a national level?"



Kelly McBride, chair of the Craig Newmark Center for Ethics and Leadership at the Poynter Institute

Watch her interview <https://youtu.be/YHpWDXC6UmA>

All-in-one broadsheets will be largely a thing of the past replaced by niche publications serving a particular community or interest. Available digital tools make it easy to start your own media, and monetization tools similar to Patreon allow creators to earn through memberships. This opens up more opportunities for underrepresented groups as well as local media startups, adding to the diversity of information and formats. More journalists will make a leap into independent publishing. Competition of news outlets with other content providers for consumers' attention — and money—will only get fiercer.

What it means: Media outlets in bigger, more affluent communities have better chances for survival than those in smaller, economically struggling ones. This will result in further spread of "news deserts" unless the issue is addressed. Innovative startups that are commercially successful will likely be acquired by larger media companies. While local media initiatives that are limited in scale will need some kind of public funding.

Information disorder

"We have to figure out a way to educate citizens to truly advocate for their own interests by consuming better journalism. We have to help [the public] navigate a very noisy environment so that they can make good choices."



Kelly McBride, chair of the Craig Newmark Center for Ethics and Leadership at the Poynter Institute

Watch her interview <https://youtu.be/YHpWDXC6UmA>

"We have to maintain the standard of journalism. You don't get to call yourself a journalist because you started a newsletter."



Jim Kennedy, head of Strategy and Enterprise Development of the Associated Press

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While more diversity and ease-of-entry on the media market is overall good news, the downside is that it will likely increase social division and polarisation, with fewer and fewer stories commonly shared and understood. Digital silos polluted with misinformation as well as blurred lines between fact and opinion will increasingly cloud public debate, particularly, on key issues such as climate change, public health, national security etc.

What it means: The trust in media will continue to be eroded. And it will become increasingly difficult to distinguish between journalism and journalism-like content produced by bloggers, activists, and influencers. Because anyone is capable of 'reporting' and starting their own podcast or a YouTube channel, there will be a critical need to define credible, trustworthy, and ethical journalism to stand out from all other types of content, regardless of platform.

Fragmentation of news environment

"In 15-20 years, the dream is to have journalism rooted in science, data and facts. Journalism built on transparency of data and methodology is what is going to build trust. It moves the debate from ideology or opinion to facts."



Nabiha Syed, the president of The Markup, a U.S. nonprofit newsroom

Watch her interview
https://youtu.be/Btner_w-ArU

"Looking into solutions when covering an issue can break the cycle of negativity, and help gain the trust of audiences. We feed [readers] a steady diet of dysfunction, failure, and disaster but people want to see a response."



Tina Rosenberg, founder of Solutions Journalism Network

Watch her interview
<https://youtu.be/wQaAFmq4bkQ>

"Working together to uncover complex stories will be a way for newsrooms and freelance journalists to cut the time and costs of producing high-value investigations and protect themselves from external attempts to stifle their reporting."



Laurent Richard, the founder of Forbidden Stories, a Paris-based not-for-profit

Watch his interview
<https://youtu.be/aTszmCj6lHc>

As people will continue to be exposed to the abundance of information providers, they will need quality journalism to help them make sense of the world in the increasingly noisy news environment. It will require changes in newsroom culture and adopting new ways to cover stories, including through data-driven, solutions-based and explanatory reporting. Some experts predict the end of "horse race journalism" (political reporting that focuses on who is in the lead rather than what policies they stand for) as well as "both sides" journalism.

What it means: Newsrooms will have to prioritise quality over quantity, and reduce the number of stories they do and choose the most valuable ones.

What's next

This year, the AJF continues its research into the future of journalism. We are diving deeper into technological trends that might reshape the media industry. We are also investigating the pathways towards public interest journalism, which is a prerequisite for a strong democracy. This includes addressing the imbalance between small and big publishers, looking for a working mix of revenue sources, and introducing legal safeguards into Australian law to protect legitimate journalism.

[1] Media, Entertainment, and Arts Alliance (MEAA). "Government must invest in regional media or more outlets will close", March 23, 2022, <https://www.meaa.org/mediaroom/government-must-invest-in-regional-media-or-more-outlets-will-close-says-meaa/>

[2] World Press Freedom Index 2022, Reporters Without Borders, Country profile "Australia" <https://rsf.org/en/country/australia>

[3] 2020, "Who gets to tell Australian stories?", Media Diversity Australia, https://www.mediadiversityaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Press-release_final.pdf

[4] Edelman Trust Barometer, February 2022, <https://www.edelman.com.au/trust-barometer-2022-australia>

[5] "The digital lives of younger Australians", Communications and Media in Australia series, Australian Communications and Media Authority, May 2021, <https://www.acma.gov.au/publications/2021-05/report/digital-lives-younger-and-older-australians>

[6] Ibid.

[7] "2021 Media content consumption survey: Key results", Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional development and Communications, January 2022, <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/2021-media-content-consumption-survey>

[8] "Digital News Report 2021", Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, p.30 <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>

[9] "Media consumer survey 2021", Deloitte Australia, <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/technology-media-and-telecommunications/articles/media-consumer-survey.html>

[10] Ibid. p. 33