

REPORT: Breaking the Consensus: media futures in a fractured world

14 March 2025



DAVID KENNEDY

david.kennedy@ventureinsights.com.au

Breaking the Consensus: Media futures in a fractured world

Abstract: The first wave of structural change in media - driven by digital disruption, globalisation, and platform dominance - is now largely played out. But the next phase, **Structural Change 2.0, is set to be even more extreme**. Media markets now face a stark fork in the road: either near-total annihilation of traditional media at the hands of AI-driven global platforms, or a paradoxical swing back in favour of local players, supported by governments determined to protect national interests.

The second Trump administration has thrown out the rulebook, acting as a catalyst for breaking away from the old political and economic consensus into **a period of rapid and unpredictable transformation**. Governments, no longer constrained by Consensus-era policies, will be free to respond in much more interventionist ways, **prioritising national resilience over market purity** and stepping in to reshape industries, including the media sector.

In this report, we examine the implications for the media industry, government regulators, and investment community. In upcoming reports, we will explore different potential scenarios for media growth, complete with granular forecasts of media ad spending.

The end of the global Consensus

“There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen.” (Vladimir Ilyich Lenin).

The weeks since President Trump’s second inauguration have certainly seen “decades happen”, after a long period of stability based on globalisation (in economics) and liberal internationalism (in politics). The post-Cold War politico-economic model (“the Consensus”), based on free capital flow, free trade, mass immigration, and more recently, zero emissions energy policies, is now under challenge. **Assumptions that underpinned global economic management and international political relations have been overturned** in what feels like the blink of an eye.

In truth, this inflection has been coming for some time. Astute observers have highlighted:

- stalled progress on WTO negotiations over the last twenty years.
- erosion of confidence in liberal institutions by partisan politics.
- disruptive impact of new technologies like social media and now artificial intelligence (AI).
- rising costs of energy, pressuring the cost of living.
- disillusionment with attempts to spread the Consensus by military means.
- rising anxiety of electorates feeling left behind by economic, social and demographic change.

- The growing economic and political bifurcation between the Eurasian “DragonBear” alliance of Russia and China on one hand, and the United States on the other.

The second Trump administration is a decisive break with the Consensus that has governed since the end of the Cold War. **In our view, this break is irreversible.** The underlying forces driving this disruption would have pushed through sooner or later, though Trump’s re-election has clearly accelerated the process. Confidence in the Consensus has been breaking down for years, and the end of the Trump administration in four years will not restore it.

But **no clear alternative has yet emerged to replace the Consensus.** We are entering a period where different visions of the future will contend to form the next Consensus. These tensions are already evident in the Trump coalition, where libertarian “tech bro”, economic nationalist, and social conservative tendencies vie for influence. We are entering a historical period of high uncertainty.

In Australia and New Zealand, echoes of this disruption can be seen. But our Westminster systems have proven better at sustaining small-c consensus over time than the winner-takes-all presidential system of the United States.

However, **our systems will come under increasing pressure** as the shocks generated by the unravelling of the old global Consensus start to strike our economic base. Australia and New Zealand have been great beneficiaries of the open trading system, and are highly dependent on open shipping routes. The shift away from globalised markets threatens to undermine our prosperity and security.

Our leadership will need to adapt to a more transactional way of doing international relations and trade. What we are bringing to the table in our relationships with major trading, investment, and defence partners? Managing tensions between our partners and preserving our access to supply chains will be paramount. Clear thinking about the national interest, and policies to protect that interest, will rise up the list of political priorities. This will require a new, higher level of statesmanship.

Media, government, and investors will feel the impact

What we know is that the US has embraced an unapologetically aggressive “**America First**” strategy, prioritising domestic tech growth over international cooperation. This means **massive investment in AI, regulatory leniency towards misinformation, and a disregard for the impact of global tech dominance** on smaller economies like Australia. Local media businesses that have relied on government intervention, such as Nine Entertainment and Seven West Media, could find themselves dangerously exposed. But there is also an opportunity for a “new deal” between government and media that could sustain a renaissance in local media.

The high-stakes gamble for Australian media operators

For Australia’s media companies, the next few years will be a brutal test of survival. The long, slow erosion of traditional media business models is now shifting into a new phase, and the potential scenarios now include both **total collapse or dramatic**

resurgence. Which way it goes will depend on how consumer demand develops and how aggressively governments intervene. Free-to-air TV networks like **Nine, Seven, and Network 10** are still dominant in key demographics, but if the AI-powered advertising ecosystem bypasses them completely, will they still have a viable future? Or, will a nationalist policy shift throw them a lifeline, forcing global platforms to pay their way and protecting local content?

Radio and out-of-home (OOH) advertising have defied digital gravity longer than most expected, with **ARN, SCA, Nova, and oOh!media** all holding strong audience and advertiser relationships. But if AI-driven programmatic advertising becomes so precise that outdoor billboards and radio spots look archaic, where does that leave them? Or perhaps a backlash against digital noise could see brands re-embracing traditional media channels, provided they evolve fast enough. Who is really betting on that outcome?

Print media and classifieds - once written off as digital roadkill - could find themselves in a surprising position. **News Corp Australia, Nine (owner of The Age and SMH), and ACM** have long been squeezed by Google and Meta, but what if governments go further than just making platforms pay for news? If policymakers see a thriving local press as a national security issue, will they rewrite the rules entirely? Meanwhile, classifieds businesses like **REA Group, Domain, and Carsales** are thriving now - but in an AI-dominated world where buyers and sellers are matched instantly, what's stopping platforms like Amazon or Google from swallowing them whole?

Even Australia's digital-first players aren't safe. **Spotify, YouTube, and TikTok** are already facing regulatory scrutiny, but what happens if consumer trust in social media collapses entirely? If audiences abandon social feeds for more controlled environments, will streaming services like **Stan, Kayo, and SBS On Demand** inherit a new golden age - or will they simply become secondary players in an AI-curated content landscape? And what of Meta, Google, and Amazon - who now sit at the apex of Australian media revenue without making much actual content? If governments start regulating them as utilities rather than private businesses, the consequences could be seismic.

The reality is, no one is playing by the old rules anymore. The Australian media industry has been in a defensive crouch for too long, assuming slow, incremental change. But this new phase of **Structural Change 2.0 isn't incremental, it is a reset.** Either the government steps in hard, rewriting the competitive landscape in favour of Australian players, or the global giants cement their dominance in ways that make recovery impossible. The next move will be decisive - but who will have the nerve to make it?

Regulation: too little, too late - or finally a reckoning?

For years, Australia's media regulators have been asleep at the wheel while global tech giants have **hollowed out our media, siphoned off ad dollars, and rewritten the cultural narrative** to suit their own interests. The result? A media landscape that,

just 20 years ago, was nearly **100% Australian-owned** is now a shadow of its former self, with **more than 70% of advertising dollars flowing offshore** to Google, Meta, and Amazon. Local players - from television and radio to print and classifieds - are squeezed by digital platforms dominating the advertising supply chain, while our government watches on, either unwilling or incapable of enforcing a level playing field.

But now, with Trump's second administration ripping up the post-Cold War rulebook, there's no excuse for inaction. If the U.S. is unapologetically prioritising **"America First"**, why is Australia still pretending that free-market idealism will protect us? The globalised model that let tech giants run rampant is breaking down, and every serious government is reassessing how to **safeguard its own media ecosystem** - except, it seems, Australia. Will it take another decade of media collapse before Canberra wakes up to the fact that an imported digital culture erodes not just local business, but **our democratic foundations themselves**?

The risks are clear. When a handful of offshore companies control **what news we see, what ads we consume, and what voices get amplified**, democracy is no longer a fair fight. We saw a glimpse of this when Meta flexed its muscles in 2021, blocking Australian news overnight just to make a political point. Imagine what happens next, when AI-driven content becomes **indistinguishable from reality** and misinformation scales faster than regulation can keep up. If the government doesn't act decisively now, **who exactly will be controlling Australian public discourse in 2030**?

It's not just about the media industry - it's about **national sovereignty**. Every other major industry has long been subject to foreign ownership rules and national security protections, so why has the media - the industry that shapes our culture and political discourse - been left to the wolves? If Trump's aggressive economic nationalism causes shockwaves, will it finally force Australia to **break out of its regulatory complacency**? If not, local media businesses - already fighting for survival - will soon have nothing left to fight for.

This is the moment of reckoning. Either Australia **reclaims control of its media future**, putting national interest before Silicon Valley profits, or we resign ourselves to a future where **our culture, economy, and political discourse are dictated by algorithms controlled in California and Beijing**. The choice is still ours - for now. But how much longer can we afford to wait?

Australian Fund Managers: betting our pensions on Big Tech - brilliant or blind?

Australian fund managers have placed an **extraordinary bet** on the so-called **Magnificent Seven** - Apple, Microsoft, Google, Amazon, Meta, Tesla, and Nvidia. These tech titans dominate global markets, and Australian superannuation funds have **piled billions into them**, riding the wave of relentless digital growth. But here's the question: **do they really understand the new dynamics at play, or are they sleepwalking into a disaster that could wipe out a generation's retirement savings?**

For years, the game has been simple - tech always wins. AI, cloud, digital advertising, and e-commerce have been the unstoppable forces driving shareholder returns. But what happens when **governments finally start pushing back**? What if regulation, economic nationalism, and geopolitical fractures **erode the dominance of these global platforms**? If the **U.S. and China carve up the digital economy**, where does that leave Australian investors who assumed a frictionless global tech market? Are fund managers truly preparing for a world where **AI replaces human jobs at an uncontrollable pace, misinformation breaks democracy, or consumers abandon toxic digital ecosystems**? Or are they just hoping the bubble inflates long enough for them to cash out?

Let's be clear - these companies are not invincible. **Meta is losing younger audiences** as social media fatigue sets in. **Google's search monopoly is under siege from AI-driven alternatives**. **Amazon's retail dominance is threatened by supply chain instability**. **Tesla is watching the EV market fragment**. Nvidia is riding an AI boom, but for how long? Betting everything on tech's continued dominance assumes that no major disruptions - political, economic, or technological - will derail their power. But history tells us that every empire falls eventually. Are Australian fund managers really looking that far ahead, or just chasing past returns in a world that's about to be unrecognisable?

The irony is that Australian super funds have largely **ignored their own backyard**. While billions flood into Silicon Valley and Wall Street, local media, tech, and industrial players have been starved of capital. If **the regulatory tide turns** and the new game is about **local resilience, domestic production, and strategic national interests**, will our fund managers be caught on the wrong side of history? Could the next great investment opportunity be **the rebuilding of Australia's media and digital ecosystem**, while offshore tech faces the full force of global pushback?

This isn't just an investment strategy - it's about **who controls the future**. Will Australian pensions be at the mercy of decisions made in Washington, Beijing, and Silicon Valley? Or will fund managers finally start **reading the writing on the wall**, looking beyond the Magnificent Seven, and positioning Australian super funds for a **world that is shifting under their feet**? The answer could determine not just market returns - but the financial security of millions of Australians. **Are they ready for that responsibility?**

Conclusion

For over a decade, Venture Insights has been at the forefront of tracking the evolution of the Australian advertising and media market. We have seen the digital disruption of print, the rise of subscription models, and the ongoing tensions between global tech giants and local media players. Our deep expertise in policy, regulation, and advertising market dynamics puts us in a unique position to forecast how these global shifts will shape Australia's media industry.

Over the coming weeks, we will release a series of reports examining four critical scenarios that could define the future of Australian advertising:

- Digital Dominance Continues – Global platforms maintain their lead, squeezing local media further.
- Fortress Australia – Government intervention prioritises Australian-owned media over global tech.
- Social Media Backlash – Consumer trust erodes, reshaping ad spend and media influence.
- AI-Powered Global Takeover – AI rewires media and advertising, centralising power among a few global players.

We will provide granular forecasts and strategic insights into these scenarios over the coming weeks. We will also identify clear implications for Australia's biggest media and advertising players - including Nine, Seven West, News Corp, Google, Meta, ARN, SCA, and oOh!media.

This is not business-as-usual. The media landscape is shifting, and the choices made today will determine who thrives and who disappears. Venture Insights will be providing the data, insights, and strategic guidance to help businesses navigate the new reality.

About Venture Insights

Venture Insights is an independent company providing research services to companies across the media, telco and tech sectors in Australia, New Zealand, and Europe.

For more information go to ventureinsights.com.au or contact us at contact@ventureinsights.com.au.

Important notice: By accepting this research note, the recipient agrees to be bound by the following terms of use. This research note has been prepared by Venture Insights Pty Ltd and published solely for guidance and general informational purposes to authorised users under the terms of a licence agreement between Venture Insights Pty Ltd and its subscriber. You need to be expressly authorised to use it, and it may only be used for your internal business purposes and no part of this note may be reproduced or distributed in any manner including, but not limited to, via the internet, without the prior permission of Venture Insights Pty Ltd. If you have not received this note directly from Venture Insights Pty Ltd, your receipt is unauthorised. If so, or you have any doubt as to your authority to use it, please return this note to Venture Insights immediately.

This research note may contain the personal opinions of research analysts based on research undertaken. This note has no regard to any specific recipient, including but not limited to any specific investment objectives, and should not be relied on by any recipient for investment or any other purposes. Venture Insights Pty Ltd gives no undertaking to provide the recipient with access to any additional information or to update or keep current any information or opinions contained herein. The information and any opinions contained herein are based on sources believed to be reliable, but the information relied on has not been independently verified. Neither Venture Insights Pty Ltd nor its officers, employees and agents make any warranties or representations, express or implied, as to the accuracy or completeness of information and opinions contained herein and exclude all liability to the fullest extent permitted by law for any direct or indirect loss or damage or any other costs or expenses of any kind which may arise directly or indirectly out of the use of this note, including but not limited to anything caused by any viruses or any failures in computer transmission.

Any trade marks, copyright works, logos or devices used in this report are the property of their respective owners and are used for illustrative purposes only. Unless otherwise disclosed, Venture Insights has no affiliation or connection with any organisations mentioned in this report. However, the information contained in this report has been obtained from a variety of sources, including in some cases the organisations themselves. In addition, organisations mentioned in this report may be clients of Venture Insights.

The recipient hereby indemnifies Venture Insights Pty Ltd and its officers, employees and agents and their related entities against any direct or indirect loss or damage or any other costs or expenses of any kind which they may incur directly or indirectly as a result of the recipient's use of this note.

© 2025 Venture Insights Pty Ltd. All rights reserved.

David Kennedy, Managing Director
david.kennedy@ventureinsights.com.au

Venture Insights
Level 3, 461 Bourke Street, Melbourne, VIC 3000