

Oireachtas Joint Committee on Artificial Intelligence, February 10th, 2026

NewsBrands Ireland briefing document: ‘AI, Truth, and Democracy’

Introduction

NewsBrands Ireland represents news publishers committed to a free and independent press, high editorial standards, and a sustainable news ecosystem. We are founding members of the Office of the Press Ombudsman and the Press Council of Ireland, and our members adhere to the Council’s Code of Practice, upholding the highest standards of accuracy, accountability, and public trust. We welcome the invitation to address the Joint Committee on Artificial Intelligence on the theme ‘AI, Truth and Democracy.’

This submission will examine the impact of AI on the information landscape and trust, the threat being posed by AI on publishers’ and broadcasters’ business models and the spectre of the extinction of journalism if AI continues to proliferate, unchecked. It suggests policy changes and initiatives that the Government can put in place to help insulate news publishers’ businesses from the worst effects of AI on the one hand, and, on the other, to encourage the responsible use of AI to support efficiency within media outlets.

AI is Distorting the Information Landscape

AI-generated content is transforming the web and social media feeds in particular, according to the Reuters report: Journalism, media, and technology trends and predictions 2026’. With more than one billion AI videos already on TikTok, there is growing concern that “human-generated, verified content will soon be drowned out by machine-made ‘AI slop’.”

AI is making deepfake creation easier and more convincing and AI-manipulated videos and photos featured in several international election campaigns, including in Europe in 2025. In addition, AI bot ‘swarms’ capable of coordinating and amplifying customised ‘fake news’ on social media are highlighted by global experts as a serious threat to democratic processes (influencing public opinion and elections). Recent developments, such as British government efforts to detect deepfakes show government and platform concerns about automated, realistic manipulation of images/video which can mislead citizens and distort political discourse. Ireland had its own experience of this with a fake video of Catherine Connolly announcing her withdrawal from the Presidential Election. Most of these videos are quickly debunked, but a small minority take off.

At the same time as the amount of manipulated content is growing exponentially, we see platforms dropping their human content checkers under pressure from the Trump regime. This jars with the policies of governments in Europe who are looking for increased obligations for tech platforms to be more accountable for the content they carry. We can also see the tactics of tech platforms in response to decisions of regulators, including Ireland’s Coimisiún na Meán and the Data Protection Commission. As reported in The Irish Times on February 9th the platforms are using their vast resources to fund endless litigation and delay their regulation. X is taking no fewer than seven legal challenges to Coimisiún na Meán decisions, including an appeal of the High Court rejection of X’s challenge to the online safety code and a request for a judicial review of a formal investigation into whether X is complying with the

provisions of the Digital Services Act. Unusually, X chose to respond to The Irish Times's request for comment. The email contained just three words: "Legacy Media Lies". But none of this will be any surprise to this Committee. Last week we saw further evidence of X's disregard for the media industry, online safety and the institutions of the State in X's refusal to attend last week's Media, Communications, Culture and Sport Committee for a discussion on online safety.

The Impact of AI On Trust

Trust is a core pillar of democratic information ecosystems; widespread skepticism toward AI-generated content can undermine confidence in journalism, which is critical for informed participation in civic life. Public surveys by the Reuters Institute (2024) found significant consumer discomfort with AI-generated news, particularly around political and sensitive topics and a potential erosion of trust in information sources. On the other hand, Red C research for the Electoral Commission found that print and digital newspapers were in the top two most-trusted information sources for voters in the 2024 elections. Democracies cannot function without a shared factual foundation.

Our publishers invest heavily in professional, fact-checked, multi-platform journalism that serves communities across Ireland and supports the wider news ecosystem - from broadcasters to search and social platforms. This journalism is produced by trained and experienced professionals, with clearly liable and accountable editors at its core. A recent study by NewsBrands and ColourText focusing on 16–30-year-olds found that 78% of respondents said they are concerned about fake news on social media, and a majority (57%) reported that they would turn first to established Irish news brands to verify something they saw on those platforms.

In an era where mis- and disinformation proliferate through digital platforms, algorithmic feeds, and AI-generated content, safeguarding the visibility and viability of reliable news and trusted sources of information is essential.

The Threat AI Poses to Journalism

It is worth making a distinction between news and journalism. News is just that - new information about recent events, whereas journalism is the process of gathering, verifying, contextualising and presenting news to the public. If our media businesses fail, news will still happen, but independent journalism in Ireland will no longer exist.

Generative AI is built on the back of journalism it refuses to pay for. By harvesting original reporting to create tools that replace news sources rather than support them, the industry is undermining the financial viability of quality journalism - and by extension, a healthy democracy.

AI is not just transforming how media content is produced or consumed - it is altering the architecture of public discourse itself. As AI ecosystems become more tightly integrated and powerful, media organisations are finding it increasingly difficult to defend access to their content from scraping, and organisations outside of these walled gardens may lose access, relevance, or the ability to innovate competitively.

Publishers' copyrighted content is being used to train AI systems without permission or compensation. Last year, NewsBrands Ireland participated in research with the University of Utrecht to determine if Irish publishers' copyrighted content had been used to train AI systems. The research confirmed that our members' content had been used, including content that was behind a paywall, live content, and in cases where publishers had reserved their rights using robots.txt and similar tools.

Any member of the public can now see 'live' summaries of unfolding events, within minutes of their occurrence through Google's AI Overviews. This raises the significant dropoff in website traffic that is being brought about both through AI Overviews, AI mode and other AI platforms. The Reuters Institute estimates that Google search traffic has reduced by one-third globally, based on data for over 2,500 sites sourced by Chartbeat. Meanwhile, new data shows that as of December 2025, AI Overviews cut organic click-through rates for the top search result by 58%. Senior media leaders surveyed by Reuters said they believed traffic from Google could reduce by almost half. In standalone AI tools, some 76% of all users do not click through to any source. Up to now, publishers have been very dependent on search for referral traffic, with up to half of website footfall coming from Google referrals. Whilst publishers were not happy their content was being used by Google and social platforms without compensation, at least there was the prospect of benefiting from the traffic. No such comfort exists with AI. Media outlets are now preparing for zero search.

In the era of agentic AI, the lines between reading, listening, watching and interacting are blurring. Users will be able to ask questions and receive fast answers, some of them based on publisher content. Publishers now need to redesign their journalism for a new AI-powered ecosystem so they can compete. The cost of transformation in an era of AI is significant and prohibitive in many cases due to licence costs for AI tools, training of staff and fundamental organisational shifts.

The result of all of this is a structural weakening of trusted journalism at precisely the moment our democracy most needs reliable information. If independent news publishing becomes economically unsustainable, the consequences will be fewer reporters, weaker scrutiny of power, greater exposure to misinformation, and declining public trust in democratic institutions. We saw last week the announcement of hundreds of staff cuts at one of the most iconic of all media brands, *The Washington Post*, joining a long list of media outlets announcing redundancies since the start of this year alone.

Role of the State in Protecting Copyright and Supporting Journalism in an AI Era

The Reuters report notes that in Ireland as elsewhere, there has been a tendency by political actors to bypass institutional media, communicating directly via social platforms and exploiting narratives about 'fake news' to delegitimise journalism. This trend is amplified in an AI landscape, where content can be manipulated or generated and disseminated at scale. This weakens media's role in democratic debate and encourages fragmented, less accountable information ecosystems. The ask from publishers is that our politicians and political institutions recognise the important role of an independent and free press to thriving democracy in their own activities and contributions to policy development.

The publishing industry was disappointed with the advice paper from the AI Advisory Council, *The Impact of AI on Ireland's Creative Sector*. The membership of the Council remains a matter of concern to the publishing industry for its failure to include any representative from publishing, media or other

creative sectors, particularly when the nascent AI industry is so well represented. Should this Committee's recommendation (9), that the Council be put on a permanent footing be actioned, it is imperative it includes representation from the media and other creative sectors.

We believe the failure of the Council to make recommendations on the EU AI Act Code of Practice and to take a view on whether Article 15 is the appropriate mechanism to regulate AI's use of copyrighted content represents a missed opportunity to spell out the importance of the provision of data and compensation from AI developers to rights holders.

It is our belief that Ireland has not taken advantage of opportunities to speak out enough at EU level on AI and copyright issues. In a discussion of EU member states on copyright last May, some 15 member states spoke in favour of enhancing copyright protection in the AI Act implementation, whereas Ireland was silent on the issue. Our international reputation as an honest broker and a principled actor will become tarnished if Ireland is seen as being the lackey of the Big Tech companies which have chosen to locate here.

The Programme for Government commits to "a strong, independent media sector that provides essential public service broadcasting, supports local journalism, and upholds press freedom," noting that "a well-resourced, transparent, and accountable media landscape is fundamental to an informed society and democracy" and pledging to "support efforts to ensure that national and local media are paid properly for their news content when it is used by online platforms." Those commitments now require delivery.

a) Delivering Transparency, Accountability and Fair Compensation

We are calling for robust Government action to ensure AI systems operating in Ireland are transparent, accountable and compliant with copyright and data protection law. Technology companies must disclose what content they use and how they use it. Fair remuneration for creators is not optional - it is the price of a sustainable information ecosystem.

Modern regulation should ensure fair value exchange between platforms, AI systems and publishers, recognising the significant public value produced by journalism. Fair compensation, whether for linking, aggregation or AI training, is essential to sustaining quality reporting and newsroom jobs.

We ask for the promotion of fair competition rules that prevent large digital platforms, including AI companies, from:

- Undermining media revenue models
- Prioritising disinformation over quality journalism
- Extracting content without fair compensation

The Government needs to insist on progress on platform transparency, including algorithmic auditing and clear rules for recommendation systems that impact access to news.

We welcome this Committee's recommendation, 14, in its report that the EU Copyright Directive needs to be strengthened to ensure the content cannot be used to train AI models without the consent of its creators. We believe the Directive needs a targeted improvement to tackle AI issues, reflecting that:

- i) Prior authorisation from rightsholders is required for using protected content to train GAI systems, or as part of the output generated by GAI systems;
- ii) GAI systems must be accountable to the principle of fair remuneration;
- iii) Remuneration proposals from AI companies must be put forward within clear and reasonable timeframes, to avoid delay tactics.

Also, given the uncertainty of how the technology and GAI products will develop, we need future-proof legislation to protect press publications through the different variations of AI. Large language models (LLMs) will power a variety of applications and press content will be used and exploited in many ways. The question not only focuses on the training of the LLM but also on the essential role of professional journalistic content in the quality of the output. Recreating a fair value chain that supports the financial viability of the press and its independence is essential.

We need full acknowledgement that our quality information and editorial content is being used to train LLMs. Tech companies have scraped copyrighted works at an industrial scale.

We will be actively contributing to the European Commission's review of the Copyright Directive this year, together with our colleagues in News Media Europe.

We made a detailed submission to the Department of Enterprise's review of the effectiveness of Article 15 of the Directive in terms of the economic benefits flowing to Irish publishers as a result of negotiated agreements with the platforms for use of their content. (This review was recommended by the Future of Media Commission in its report published in July 2022, submitted to the Government a year earlier.)

The Department of Enterprise report, published in November 2024, a year after the close of submissions, found:

"In summary, while Article 15 of the Copyright Directive, as transposed by Regulation 13, offers a promising framework for all parties to work towards securing fair remuneration for the online use of press publishers' content, its current implementation has exposed significant difficulties. The Department has noted these difficulties as expressed by all stakeholders concerned. It remains committed to finding solutions, with stakeholders, to the difficulties expressed as part of this consultation. This will include full engagement with the EU Commission on this particular issue in order to ensure that the Commission's planned review of the implementation of the entire Directive (in 2026) takes full account of the issues raised in this consultation. In the meantime, the Department will reflect further on the issues raised."

As outlined in this document, since the Department published its report, and committed to reflecting further on its findings, the appropriation of publisher content by AI systems has emerged as a new challenge threatening a sustainable business model for quality journalism.

b) Protecting Journalism and Supporting Responsible AI

Ireland needs AI and digital policies that protect journalists from harmful uses of AI (deepfakes, automated harassment, surveillance) and enables newsrooms to ethically adopt AI tools without compromising integrity or copyright.

NewsBrands Ireland is calling for responsible and compliant AI systems. Companies that engage in AI must be transparent and accountable about copyright, privacy, use of data and purpose. The news industry is committed to keeping the trust of its readers while integrating AI. The use of AI to assist editorial processes and journalistic work (eg. translation, transcripts of interviews, illustration of covers and websites, summaries) falls within editorial responsibility and human scrutiny. We are committed to ensuring there will always be a human liable and accountable for news products generated with the assistance of AI.

c) Implementing and Enforcing the EU AI Act

The EU AI Act provides critical safeguards for creators and rights-holders, including requirements that AI companies publish detailed summaries of copyrighted data used to train their models and clear labelling of AI-generated content. These provisions should allow publishers to be compensated for the use of their journalism.

Meaningful implementation of the EU AI Act in Ireland is required to enable creators and rights-holders to exercise and enforce their rights when it comes to ingesting and copying copyright-protected works for training AI models. News publishers invest significant time and resources generating content that big tech companies are seeking to mine for the purposes of automatically generating profitable content without further investment. The EU's AI Act provides stringent rules for providers of general-purpose AI models; these rules need to be meaningfully implemented and enforced. Per the Committee's recommendation, 11, Ireland must not try to dilute the Act.

Ireland can be a leader, particularly during its presidency, in ensuring the provisions of the AI Act are implemented in Irish law and in calling for reviews of other regulations from the EU to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

NewsBrands Ireland is working with News Media Europe on recommendations to the European Commission aimed at helping companies comply with the AI Act, including transparency and copyright-related rules, risk assessment and mitigation measures. News Media Europe has expressed serious concerns about the Code of Practice on General Purpose Artificial Intelligence (CoP), which is moving away from meeting the objectives foreseen by the Act.

d) Supporting Media Sustainability Without Dependency

As an industry, we are not seeking or want to become dependent on Government handouts to run our businesses. However, if schemes are being devised to help the media industry stay in business, they must be created with the needs of publishers and broadcasters in mind and involve meaningful consultation. A case in point is the allocation of €4m for the Digital Transformation and News Reporting Schemes, which is entirely inadequate given the need for media companies to adopt AI tools to operate more efficiently and create superior product experiences for users and subscribers.

There are ample examples of states choosing to support their media outlets in securing their copyright, including Australia, Canada and France.

Conclusion

We believe Ireland can lead the way in championing the vital role of media in underpinning democracies. At home, we are asking Government to shape policies around ensuring traditional media is able to assert its ownership of expensive, original, human produced content, that media outlets have a sustainable business model and an ability to innovate, and that publishers can incorporate AI into their processes in a safe and responsible way. In an international context, we are asking the Irish Government to use its voice to assert its belief in the role of media as a gatekeeper of democracy, particularly during the Irish presidency of the EU.

NewsBrands Ireland is committed to working with Government, regulators and industry to counter misinformation and deepfakes, improve media literacy, secure publishers' rights and safeguard the future of quality journalism in Ireland. The time to act is now.

NewsBrands Ireland is the representative body for print and digital national news publishers.

Our members are:

The Irish Times DAC: Irish Examiner; The Irish Times; irishtimes.com; examiner.ie; breakingnews.ie

Business Post Group: Business Post; BusinessPost.ie

The Agricultural Trust: Farmers Journal; farmersjournal.ie

DMG Media Ireland: Irish Daily Mail; Irish Mail on Sunday; Evoke.ie; Extra.ie,

News Ireland: The Sunday Times; The Irish Sun; thetimes.ie; irishsun.ie

Reach: Irish Daily Star; Irish Daily Mirror; Irish Sunday Mirror; Buzz.ie; Mirror.ie

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