

Constructive media in New Zealand

The role of an independent news group

Abstract: New Zealand has close ties with its Pacific neighbours but its mainstream media often overlooks issues involving major power influences on Pacific affairs. Also, while Asians form the largest population increase by ethnic group, issues impacting them are largely underrepresented. To address the issues impacting the Asia Pacific region and their people, the Asia Pacific Media Network (APMN) was established in 2022. It uses the talents of its diverse membership pool comprising academics, journalists, researchers and community activists to improve Asia Pacific advocacy and communication for social change and justice. This study aims to analyse the role and work of APMN as constructive media, an approach anchored in ethical practice, civic engagement, democratic deliberations and social responsibility. Findings show that APMN promotes constructive journalism that has an inclusive outlook, with a focus on the future and countering negative bias in the media. Beyond presenting social problems, it also looks for solutions and empowers marginalised groups.

Keywords: Asia Pacific issues, constructive media, independent journalism, marginalisation, news representation, social change and justice

KHAIRIAH A RAHMAN
Auckland University of Technology

ADAM BROWN
Independent Researcher, Auckland

Introduction

NEW Zealand's media system is navigating a turbulent period in its modern history. Declining public trust, newsroom closures, ownership concentration, and persistent underrepresentation of Māori, Pacific and other minority groups have all contributed to the current environment. These challenges threaten the democratic role of journalism by reducing the diversity of voices and limiting the public's access to credible, inclusive information. Scholarly analyses and industry reports emphasise that the erosion of both audience confidence and institutional capacity is intertwined as fewer journalists and less diverse perspectives lead to diminishing perceived credibility and weak

civic engagement (Goodenough et al., 2024; Loto et al., 2006; Myllylahti, 2024).

While trust in the media is widely regarded as a barometer of democratic health, New Zealand's Journalism, Media and Democracy (JMAD) Research Centre has tracked a steady decline in audience trust since 2020 with improvement from 2024 for individual brands such as Whakaata Māori, Iwi Radio, RNZ and *The Spinoff*. The most trusted news brand is Radio New Zealand (RNZ), followed by the *Otago Daily Times* while both TVNZ and *National Business Review (NBR)* received the third highest trust scores. (Myllylahti & Treadwell, 2025). The recovery in trust for public and community-focused outlets suggests there is still public appetite for reliable, independent reporting. This supports the founding of the Asia Pacific Media Network (APMN).

Overall, the JMAD study found that trust remains low with 32 percent of people trusting 'news in general' while 45 percent trust the news they personally consume. This shows that audiences make distinctions between outlets they follow and 'the news' as a whole. Still, low trust in news means fewer people agree on what is true, which presents a challenge for public discussion and decision-making. Also, declining trust has behavioural implications. Audiences who distrust mainstream outlets increasingly turn to social media or unverified online sources, fragmenting shared factual baselines. This loss of 'common knowledge' diminishes journalism's traditional role as a civic forum and undermines collective accountability (Goodenough et al., 2024).

With digital fragmentation, it is harder for audiences to distinguish professional journalism from opinion, misinformation, or algorithmically curated content. Moreover, audience perceptions of political bias, especially during elections and pandemic coverage, have widened divides in confidence. Stats NZ's (2024) social indicators report noted a broader decline in trust across public institutions, including media, government, and local councils.

Economic challenges across the media sector have accelerated since 2020, driven by falling advertising revenues, platform dominance, and high production costs. In early 2024, Warner Bros. Discovery announced the planned closure of its national newsroom, Newshub, citing unsustainable financial losses (Craymer, 2024a). The decision resulted in hundreds of job losses and the effective disappearance of one of the country's two major television newsrooms. Although the Stuff Group later stepped in to produce a replacement news programme for television (Craymer, 2024b), analysts warn that consolidation reduces competition and the plurality of editorial voices.

Local journalism has suffered even more dramatically. Many community newspapers and regional radio outlets have closed or been merged. A 2025 *Spinoff* feature documented how once-vibrant suburban papers in Auckland and Wellington had nearly vanished, leaving large urban populations without consistent local reporting (Whaley, 2025). This weakens civic participation as

councils and local boards will receive less scrutiny, while communities lose a key space for dialogue about governance.

The media industry's economic fragility also constrains investigative and long-form reporting. When advertising and subscription revenues fail to cover operational costs, outlets shift towards low-cost, high-traffic online content which are often click-driven or repurposed wire stories. This shift risks eroding journalism's public-interest value and widening the informational divide between metropolitan and regional audiences.

Underrepresentation of Pacific issues and communities in New Zealand media

Media studies indicate that New Zealand mainstream media have frequently marginalised issues concerning Pacific Island nations and Pacific communities, producing uneven coverage that can obscure major power influences in the region including diplomatic deals, security partnerships, and development finance (Ahearn, 2022; Loto et.al, 2006). The marginalisation of issues is linked to under-representation of Pacific journalists and editors, newsroom priorities that centre on domestic stories, and structural pressures such as resources, news beats and commercial logics. The consequence is lower public awareness in New Zealand about important Pacific developments, risk of paternalistic framing, and reinforcement of Eurocentric policy narratives. Empirical studies, institutional reports, and news cases, such as New Zealand's diplomatic tensions with the Cook Islands and growing China engagement in the Pacific, illustrate these dynamics (Ahearn, 2022; Corlett, 2025; Craymer, 2025; Goodenough et al., 2024; Robie, 2018).

The Pacific region has experienced climate vulnerability and geopolitical contestation, involving powers like China, Australia and New Zealand. While media coverage shapes public understanding and policy debate, when mainstream outlets in New Zealand underreport or frame Pacific issues through metropolitan lenses, this affects democratic deliberation and may privilege paternalistic or Eurocentric interpretations of Pacific agency and interests. A study of 21 theses addressing the topic of diversity in the New Zealand media found persistent gaps in how ethnic and minority issues such as Pacific stories are framed and covered in news media (Goodenough et. al., 2024)., The authors identified a clear research trend towards 'ethnic media' as a way to 'counter hegemonic discourses, challenging some of the more problematic discourses of mainstream outlets'(p. 15).

Lack of representation and biased reporting of Asian communities in NZ news

Asian communities are a fast-growing and diverse group in New Zealand (Heyes, 2024; Stats NZ, 2024) but they continue to be consistently under-represented both in newsrooms and within news content (Irvine & Morgan, 2021; Pearson & Kothari, 2022). This gap is evident in terms of fewer Asian journalists and decision-makers, limited coverage of issues that matter to Asian

communities, and frequent framing that highlights cultural difference or risk rather than complexity and contribution. The result is a partial public story that reduces democratic inclusion and increases the chance of stereotyping and social polarisation. This is demonstrated in the Broadcasting Standards Authority (2024) report that 76 percent of Asian respondents felt exposure to offensive and discriminatory content is a problem in New Zealand media and 52 percent of Asians avoided TV and radio due to harmful content.

Asian representation in mainstream newsroom staff and on-air roles has historically lagged behind their share of the public, contributing to structural invisibility in mainstream narratives. With few Asians in senior editorial roles and local screen projects, story selection, angle, and sourcing often reflect non-Asian perspectives (Lu, 2025; NZ on Air, 2021; Pearson & Kothari, 2022). This means that issues like multilingual information needs, migrant-specific labour or housing problems, and intra-Asian diversity (e.g., differences between Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Korean communities) receive less nuanced coverage or are absent. While specialist Asian language outlets exist, they serve segmented audiences and rarely affect mainstream editorial agendas.

There are common patterns of bias in reporting in New Zealand media through framing, sourcing and story frequency. Not only are diverse communities conflated into a single 'Asian' entity, erasing internal differences of history, language and socioeconomics, but they are also stereotyped and culturalised as all sharing the same cultural traits in reportage on complex social phenomena such as health outcomes, business acumen and crime (Walton & Truong, 2022). A widely cited controversy occurred when a magazine cover story framed Asian immigration as a social problem and used alarmist language that provoked formal complaints and public debate about racism in reporting (Oliver, 2007).

The 'Asian angst' controversy surrounded an article in the *North & South* magazine by Deborah Coddington that linked rising Asian immigration to a surge in crime, a claim later ruled inaccurate and discriminatory by the Press Council. The article was condemned for using misleading statistics, ignoring the parallel increase in the Asian population, and employing racist stereotypes to incite fear, leading to formal complaints and a ruling that it breached journalistic principles of accuracy and non-discrimination (Asia New Zealand Foundation, n.d.). The scapegoating of Asians in crises was also well documented during COVID-19, where reporting implied blame on Asians as a heightened safety risk, fuelling xenophobia and racism incidents (Jaung et. al., 2022).

Against this background of misrepresentation and underrepresentation of minority communities in New Zealand, APMN was founded to provide an independent and alternative news source to mitigate the gap in coverage and to give voice to marginalised groups for a more fairly represented and democratic public sphere.

Constructive media, independent journalism and constructive journalism

It is important to explicate certain terms used in this study to analyse the role of APMN as an independent and constructive media. Independent journalism describes the practice of factual reporting that is free from government control while constructive journalism (CJ) builds upon this foundation by focusing on solutions to problems, rather than the problems themselves. CJ moves beyond traditional negative bias by exploring solutions, providing diverse perspectives, and empowering audiences through a more forward-thinking approach to news storytelling.

Constructive media is frequently discussed in the academic literature under such labels as *constructive journalism*, *solutions journalism*, and *positive/constructive news*. Academics and practitioners have deliberated on the role of CJ, its characteristics, benefits and limitations (Hermans, 2025; Jørgensen & Risbro, 2021; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017; Ollrog, Hanisch & Rook, 2021). CJ first gained academic traction in the mid-2010s when Ulrik Haagerup introduced a ‘reporting model’ that sought to correct the negative bias in traditional journalism. The model supports a holistic portrayal of reality by presenting potential solutions alongside problems, encouraging public discourse and civic engagement (Ollrog, Hanisch & Rook, 2021). The constructive approaches of this form of journalism are seen as a cluster of practices and norms rather than a single prescriptive method, with an emphasis on varied motivations, from improving mental health to strengthening democratic deliberation. (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017).

As a concept, CJ is an interdisciplinary response to concerns about news negativity, civic disengagement, and declining public trust in media. It expands on traditional problem-focused reporting with reporting that examines responses to social problems and highlights agency and solutions. CJ adopts practices drawn from peace journalism and positive psychology to support audience well-being and civic engagement, embedding principles such as empathy, empowerment, and forward-looking reporting (Ollrog, Hanisch & Rook, 2021).

Challenges in constructive journalism

There are several key challenges in CJ. Firstly, there are tensions with traditional objectivity and news values. Van Antwerpen and Fielding (2023) describe how the dominant paradigm of ‘objectivity’ (in Western journalism) privileges a detached, ‘just the facts’ style, while CJ challenges this by acknowledging subjectivity, emphasising context, future-orientation, solution-focus, and co-creation of meaning in news. Reporting solutions or future-directions can be seen as advocacy, agenda-setting or partiality, thus risking accusations of bias or ‘positivity bias’. Related research notes that CJ may be misconstrued as mere ‘good news’ or joyful stories rather than rigorous journalism (Lofgren, 2023). The challenge for CJ is how to remain credible, rigorous and non-partisan while shifting from purely problem-centric to also solution-oriented.

One of the most persistent challenges in implementing CJ lies in the structural realities of newsroom operations. Studies of journalistic practice as such research on war and crisis coverage show that journalists often face constraints of time, staffing, and tight deadlines, which encourage routine, event-driven, and often negative-focus coverage (Heinrichs et al., 2022). The daily demands of fast-paced news cycles mean that newsrooms tend to prioritise breaking news, conflict, or outrage-driven stories that attract immediate audience attention and engagement. These commercial and editorial pressures leave little space for slower, deeper, and more context-rich reporting that characterises CJ. Without explicit structural support such as editorial mandates, dedicated training, or adjustments to newsroom workflows, constructive practices frequently remain marginal, treated as side-projects or pilot experiments rather than as core journalistic functions (Heinrichs et al., 2022; van Antwerpen & Fielding, 2023).

Another major issue is the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding what constructive journalism actually entails. Van Antwerpen and Fielding (2023) note that many practitioners and editors still perceive CJ as under-defined. Questions persist over what qualifies as ‘constructive’ and where the line lies between journalism and advocacy. This definitional ambiguity can lead to misapplication in practice. When journalists equate CJ with ‘feel-good’ or ‘happy news,’ they risk undermining its credibility and diluting its critical edge (Hermans & Gyldensted, 2018). Overly optimistic or celebratory stories that ignore systemic root causes can reduce public trust, as audiences may perceive such coverage as uncritical or partial. Misapplication may also involve overemphasising ‘what works’ narratives without sufficient scrutiny of power dynamics, structural inequalities, or the limits of proposed solutions (van Antwerpen & Fielding, 2023).

Another recurring concern is how to reconcile constructive approaches with journalism’s traditional watchdog role. Critics argue that focusing on solutions and future-oriented narratives can risk diluting journalism’s adversarial function which is its responsibility to expose wrongdoing and hold power to account (Hermans & Gyldensted, 2018). A superficial application of CJ may lead to co-option by powerful actors, subtle advocacy, or the neglect of systemic problems that still require scrutiny. Van Antwerpen and Fielding (2023) respond directly to this concern, emphasising that constructive journalism is not about abandoning the core principles of accuracy, balance, and accountability but about enhancing them through deeper context and civic engagement. Nonetheless, integrating CJ principles while maintaining investigative rigour remains a practical struggle for many newsrooms that operate under commercial and political pressures.

Audience engagement presents both an opportunity and a challenge for constructive journalism. Research by the Constructive Institute (2024) shows that audiences tend to appreciate solution-focused, forward-looking reporting, and that such content may foster trust and reduce news avoidance. However, questions remain

about how to measure these effects and integrate them into existing performance metrics that are typically driven by clicks, views, and social media shares. Without clear evidence of commercial or editorial benefits, many organisations may revert to more conventional news formats that prioritise sensational or conflict-oriented stories. To sustain constructive practices, newsrooms must therefore develop new indicators of success such as trust, knowledge gains, or civic engagement which better reflect journalism's democratic function (Constructive Institute, 2024).

CJ also aspires to promote inclusiveness, diversity, and community co-creation. Van Antwerpen and Fielding (2023) identify these as essential techniques for producing more equitable and contextually rich reporting. Yet, in practice, many newsrooms still lack structural diversity such as in their staff composition, source selection, and editorial decision-making. This limits the perspectives represented in stories and perpetuates narrow worldviews. Moreover, genuine co-creation with communities requires time, trust, and new forms of collaboration that many traditional outlets are not yet equipped to sustain. When CJ is practised from a top-down perspective which entails telling audiences about solutions rather than engaging them in the process, it risks reproducing existing power hierarchies and missing its promise of participatory, inclusive journalism (van Antwerpen & Fielding, 2023).

Perhaps the most complex challenge to the CJ concept that is central to this study is the contention that 'active is not activism'. Several academics advance the contention that while journalism may adopt an active posture of being future-oriented, solution-aware and engaged, it must avoid sliding into activism (Gleim et al., 2022; van Antwerpen & Hermans, 2025). In their study, media practitioners saw 'activating their public towards civic engagement as distinct from an activist role' (p.12). This framing emphasises that journalism retains the core functions of inquiry, verification, public service and neutrality. It should participate in public discourse by facilitating understanding and possibilities, but it should not become an advocate for specific outcomes or causes. The authors argue that if journalism crosses into activism, it risks compromising its role as an independent watchdog, losing credibility, and becoming partial or promotional. In this view, CJ should not be a vehicle for advocacy or campaign-style activism. While journalists may be active in terms of offering future-oriented, constructive reporting, they should not be an activist in the sense of lobbying for specific solutions or aligning with particular social movement agendas.

Journalism and advocacy: Why they need not be mutually exclusive

While the argument against advocacy and activism has strong grounding in classical journalism ethics, there is a compelling counter-case that advocacy and journalism are not inherently incompatible. Responsible journalistic practice in many contexts necessitates some form of advocacy, especially when it

aligns with core values such as democracy, human rights and public interest. Although critics of blending the two argue that advocacy risks impairing journalistic objectivity, introduces bias, and erodes the watchdog role (van Antwerpen & Fielding, 2023), in contemporary media environments, this dichotomy is increasingly contested.

First, normative journalism theory acknowledges that complete neutrality is a myth. Selection of stories, framing, sourcing and voice always involve value judgments. Constructive journalism frameworks posit that journalism can engage future-oriented, solution-focused, inclusive perspectives without abandoning rigour (van Antwerpen & Fielding, 2023). In this sense, a news organisation can ethically integrate advocacy such as for social justice, equity and minority rights, as long as it retains transparency, maintains standards of accuracy and accountability, and clearly demarcates where mission-oriented commentary begins. Thus, journalism and advocacy are not inherently contradictory. When practised with professional safeguards, they can function complementarily. Advocacy can drive the agenda to cover under-reported issues, while journalism ensures evidence, critique, context and accountability.

Rather than viewing journalism and advocacy as mutually exclusive categories, a more realistic paradigm sees them on a continuum. Advocacy becomes problematic only when it lacks transparency, disregards opposing views and treats sources uncritically. But when journalists clearly disclose commitments, maintain accuracy, fairness and allow critique of all actors, including their own preferred solutions, then advocacy-oriented journalism can still fulfil normative standards of the profession (Media Helping Media, n.d.). This integrated model better reflects contemporary challenges such as misinformation, under-represented communities and climate crisis.

A complete disregard for the value of advocacy in journalistic practise may oversimplify the complex relationship between journalism and social change. In many current media-society contexts, especially those facing systemic injustice, marginalisation or democratic erosion, journalism ethically and responsibly incorporates advocacy, so long as standards of verification, transparency, inclusivity and balance are upheld. CJ frameworks support this integration by emphasising solutions, empowerment and agency. Rather than treating journalism and advocacy as mutually exclusive, a more productive stance is to embed advocacy within a strong journalistic framework that remains accountable, reflective and open to critique. In a media ecosystem where many voices are marginalised, the coupling of constructive journalism and advocacy may help correct structural silences while preserving journalistic integrity.

Talanoa journalism

While this study focuses on CJ, it is important to acknowledge regional practices

that align closely with it. The concept of Talanoa journalism (TJ) emerges as a Pacific-centric journalistic model grounded in inclusive, contextual, relational storytelling that emphasises dialogue, cultural context and ‘a Pacific way’ of journalism (Robie, 2019). TJ is thus grassroots reporting on community-focussed issues, where its participatory model requires education and training to mitigate misinformation and disinformation, ensuring its accuracy and inclusivity contribute to trust, not confusion (Robie 2022a, 2022b, 2024). TJ aligns closely with constructive journalism, as both prioritise deeper engagement, community voices and future-oriented reporting rather than purely event-driven negativity. TJ’s emphasis on grassroots perspectives, consensus building and culturally relevant narratives complements CJ’s techniques of inclusiveness, empowerment and context-rich solutions. In the Pacific media environment, where many communities are under-represented and face social, environmental and post-colonial challenges, both Talanoa and constructive approaches play critical roles. They foster trust, amplify marginalised voices, promote media plurality and support socially responsible journalism, providing media practice models in the Pacific that are ethically, culturally and democratically responsive.

Methodology

The methodology uses a qualitative analysis of the work and role of APMN in terms of specific CJ characteristics. Based on the literature review of CJ, both from the academic and industry practitioners’ perspectives, the following characteristics of CJ were identified:

- CJ should be understood as rigorous, evidence-based reporting that incorporates six core techniques: solutions, future orientation, inclusiveness and diversity, empowerment, context, and co-creation (Van Antwerpen & Fielding, 2023). Embedding community engagement, diversity, and co-creation relies on genuine collaboration between journalists and the communities they cover. Van Antwerpen and Fielding (2023) identify inclusiveness, diversity, and co-creation as central elements of a constructive approach. Journalists should engage affected communities early in the story-development process, inviting multiple perspectives and ensuring that local voices shape both problem definition and solution framing. Building sustained relationships with community organisations, minority-language media, and civil-society actors can help make coverage more relevant and equitable (Constructive Institute, 2024).
- CJ should build a newsroom culture that is forward-looking, and values long-form, reflective journalism rather than simply speed and novelty. The allocation of time and resources for contextual reporting, follow-up stories covering actions taken on an issue or what the public could do

would help reduce the dominance of negativity bias in story selection (Heinrichs et al., 2022).

- CJ should maintain the watchdog role alongside constructive framing. Reporters should continue to investigate wrongdoing, evaluate policies, and hold power to account, even when presenting possible solutions or positive developments. Van Antwerpen and Fielding (2023) describe this as practising an ‘active form of objectivity,’ one that recognises subjectivity and transparency as integral to fair reporting.
- CJ should define metrics and evaluate impact. Measurements for effective journalism should go beyond traditional performance indicators such as clicks and views. The Constructive Institute (2024) reports that solution-oriented news tends to improve audience mood, engagement, and trust while reducing news avoidance. Encouraging audience participation through qualitative feedback channels or crowdsourced reporting can transform audiences from passive consumers into active participants in democratic discourse (Constructive Institute, 2024).

Findings are categorised and discussed within the framework of the identified CJ characteristics.

Results and discussion

At the end of 2020, with the retirement of its director, Professor David Robie, the Pacific Media Centre (PMC) ceased to operate. The centre was known for its ‘robust and informed journalism and media research [that] contributes to economic, political and social development in the Asia-Pacific region’ (PMC Annual Review, 2020, p. 7). In particular, the centre was known for its advocacy work in climate change, indigenous and minority reportage, its fair reporting principles and work in peace journalism. In line with this vision to positively impact society, the Asia Pacific Media Network (APMN) was established in 2022.

The APMN describes itself as ‘a nonprofit collective of journalists, academics, researchers and community activists based in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific dedicated to publication, analysis and research for better and more creative Asia Pacific advocacy and communication for social change and justice’ (Asia Pacific Media Network, n.d.). APMN’s mission-driven platform is particularly well-suited to apply the CJ characteristics because it prioritises long-form research, regional perspectives, and community engagement over commercial news cycles. APMN’s portfolio, including the *Pacific Journalism Review* (APMN, n.d.) and *Asia Pacific Report*, and its partnerships with diverse media outlets provides multiple, demonstrable examples of constructive practice in action.

1. Solutions orientation

Constructive journalism seeks not only to explain problems but to report on responses and potential solutions. APMN routinely publishes policy critiques

and accompanying proposals that go beyond reportage to highlight what is being done and what might work. For example, APMN’s public interventions on media regulation in Papua New Guinea included both a critique of the draft rules and an explicit call for alternative approaches and greater consultation, thereby signalling possible policy pathways rather than only cataloguing failures. This approach mirrors CJ’s solutions focus. APMN identifies problems while signalling concrete responses and civic options for reform. (*Asia Pacific Report*, 2023).

2. Future orientation and long-form reporting

AcoreCJtechniqueisforward-looking coverage and allocation of space for deeper reporting rather than prioritisingonlybreakingnews.APMN’swork, including the editorial and research remit of the *Pacific Journalism Review (PJR)*, emphasises sustained, contextual research and commentary on structural issues such as media freedom, climate impacts and regional governance. The *PJR*’s role as a research journal and APMN’s stated plan to expand into community media and training demonstrates institutional support for the kind of long-form, contextual reporting CJ advocates. Such emphasis counters the immediacy and negativity bias that dominate many commercial outlets (*Pacific Journalism Review*, n.d.). The final issue of the *PJR* was published in July 2024 (Figure 1). It contains articles on West Papua; media rights and free speech; disinformation; the viability of journalism; industry training; conflict analysis; climate change; and journalism in the Pacific. Over the last two years, many articles have concentrated on the death of Palestinian journalists, and criticism of the poor coverage of Gaza in the mainstream New Zealand media. Through its publication, APMN support articles for social change. APMN’s new journal, *Pacific Media*, starts publication in 2025 and follows the tradition of *PJR*, albeit with a wider Asia Pacific scope of topics and inclusivity of diverse members.

3. Inclusiveness, diversity and co-creation

Van Antwerpen and Fielding (2023) highlight inclusiveness, diversity and



Figure 1: Final 30 years edition of *PJR* in 2024.

co-creation as central to constructive practice. APMN's membership model and community hub orientation reflect these priorities. APMN explicitly links journalists, academics, community activists and minority-language initiatives. It operates at the Whānau (Family) Community Centre/Hub in Mt Roskill in Auckland, which functions as a local anchor for engagement and co-created projects. APMN's editorial stance and partnership activity, including collaborative research and region-wide commentary, show that stories are often developed with, and drawn from, regional communities rather than an imposed top-down approach. This praxis parallels CJ's call for early engagement with affected communities and multiple perspectives.

4. Empowerment and audience participation

Constructive journalism aims to empower audiences by providing actionable information and opportunities for participation (Constructive Institute, 2024). APMN's community training initiatives, public statements on media rights, and its role in publishing practitioner-oriented research create pathways for civic engagement. Community members and civil-society actors are invited into research, training and policy conversations, which equip them to act and respond. The APMN approach therefore reproduces CJ's empowerment outlook; not as mere feel-good messaging but as concrete capacity building such as training, local hubs, and co-authored analysis (*Asia Pacific Report*, 2023).

5. Context and watchdog function (active objectivity)

CJ stresses that being constructive does not replace the watchdog role of journalism: constructive reporters should still investigate power, expose wrongdoing, and subject solutions to critical scrutiny (van Antwerpen & Fielding, 2023). APMN demonstrates this balance in practice through its critiques of censorship, media regulation, and poor coverage such as on Gaza and other contested international issues. It also combines activist-inclined advocacy with evidence-based critique and scholarly analysis via *PJR*. APMN's constructive stance includes accountability. Proposals and solutions are accompanied by power analysis and critical appraisal rather than mere promotion. This practice aligns with CJ's 'active form of objectivity' (*Asia Pacific Report*, 2024).

6. Metrics, evaluation and trust-building

Constructive journalism scholars encourage measuring impact beyond clicks, including trust, mood, comprehension and civic engagement (Constructive Institute, 2024). APMN's research-oriented outputs (peer-reviewed journal articles, policy briefs and community reports) are designed for cumulative impact: they feed academic debate, inform advocacy, and support community organising rather than chase fleeting metrics. While APMN is still developing systematic impact metrics publicly, its model which combines research, training and community-facing reporting, represents the institutional preconditions necessary

for CJ-style evaluation. This could include audience studies, trust surveys and qualitative feedback loops. Continued adoption of explicit CJ evaluation tools would help APMN document and scale the trust and engagement benefits that the Constructive Institute identifies (Constructive Institute, 2024).

Two examples of APMN international projects use all the characteristics of CJ. The projects involve partnership and participation in global conferences on Pacific and Asian issues. APMN recognises the opportunity to provide a platform for sharing Pacific and Asian studies since issues affecting these groups have been underreported by mainstream media.

1. The Pacific International Media conference

The Pacific International Media Conference was held in Fiji between 4 and 6 July 2024. The organising partners were The University of the South Pacific (USP), the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA), and the APMN. It was well attended with two deputy prime ministers of Fiji, several other dignitaries from the Pacific, and a strong media presence. Many papers focussed on the hosting nation, Fiji, as well as particular issues faced by Pacific countries. Themes that emerged from the conference included:

- ***Freedom of the press.*** In particular, the leadership of Fiji changed from Frank Bainimarama to Sitiveni Rabuka in 2022, leading to a rise from #89 to #44 in Fiji's ranking in the Reporters Without Borders world press rankings.
- ***Climate change.*** Many Pacific nations are small, low-lying islands very susceptible to rising sea levels. This has led to widespread flooding, with problems of accessibility for reporters, on already poor road infrastructure.
- ***Local solutions.*** Local problems require local solutions, often making use of indigenous knowledge. Solutions that work in overseas countries (Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere) may be inappropriate, and not work, on a Pacific island.
- ***AI, fake news, social media.*** A New Zealand survey found only 33 percent of respondents trust the news, and 39 percent do not follow the news, in particular finding Western outlets such as the BBC, CNN and *New York Times* biased in their reporting. Also, modern technologies allow unreferenced and unedited content on media platforms, shifting onto the reader the burden of deciding what is real, true, accurate, unbiased and fair.
- ***Sexual discrimination.*** There is widespread discrimination against women in the profession. This may take the form of discrimination in recruitment, cyberbullying and harassment. In Fiji, 40% of female reporters had experienced physical harassment, and one-third psychological harassment. As a result, reporters are leaving the profession.
- ***Funding.*** All outlets require funding for their operations. However, while

funding may be available, it is important to have no-strings-attached funding, so that journalistic integrity and fairness can be maintained.

While the theme ‘Navigating challenges and shaping futures in Pacific media research and practice’ allowed researchers in the region to showcase their work that is pertinent to the Pacific, panel sessions also allowed for dialogue, co-creation and sharing of narratives. Feedback loops, both formal and informal, indicate that participants were committed and empowered to speak on discrimination and corruption issues. The inaugural edition of *Pacific Media* journal includes submissions from the Pacific International Media Conference 2024. This support instils confidence and assures emerging Pacific scholars and authors that there is a dedicated outlet for their well-researched work.

2. *The Asian Congress for Media and Communication Conference 2024*

The Asian Congress for Media and Communication (ACMC) Conference 2024 was held at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City from 31 October to 2 November 2024. The theme ‘Media Construct, Constructive Media’ welcomed a variety of streams from ‘Mass Media and Society’ to ‘Technology, Credibility and News Media Content’. ACMC had requested a collaboration with APMN for the publication of selected papers from its conference, an event that occurs once in two years. The agreement to publish a special edition of this *Pacific Media* underpins CJ’s inclusiveness and empowerment practices to assist the ACMC by providing the expertise and structural support. APMN representatives also attended and participated in the ACMC 2024 conference.

Both international conference projects employed all the CJ characteristics. Future-orientation and solutions underpin APMN’s partnerships with these organisations. APMN’s network orientation (academics, activists, journalists) enables bridging between advocacy and CJ, offering partners diverse professional perspectives.

In addition, APMN’s membership across Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Indonesia and the Philippines means a multiplicity of voices support inclusiveness and diversity, amplifying multiple perspectives and stakeholder inclusion.

There is also co-creation of outputs and decision-making as advocacy is not reduced to single dictation of solutions. CJ invites the community into planning, source selection and follow-up. Also, context and accountability are core tenets as advocacy must still be grounded in facts, critique and power dynamics. CJ emphasises journalistic integrity which means that analysis of issues should focus more on actionable information than promotional. APMN’s role in exposing discrimination, corruption, and analysing traditional media itself, as research, demonstrates this. Finally, the role of APMN in empowerment is to enable action. Advocacy naturally aims for change and CJ complements this by ensuring its partners have information, agency and awareness of choices.

Conclusion

This study discusses the role of Constructive Journalism and presents the work of the Asia Pacific Media Network (APMN) in New Zealand as constructive journalism in practice. While the majority of APMN's work focuses on Pacific issues, activities and events, it also covers shared issues with Asia such as climate change, political challenges and colonialism. APMN highlights under-reported issues and publishes academic and practice-based reports.

Still in its infancy, APMN has already jointly organised a Pacific Media Conference with The University of the South Pacific in 2024 and its members are actively engaged in advocacy work for social change, representing the rights of the marginalised. APMN is set to continue its collaborative work with indigenous and minority communities throughout New Zealand, the Pacific and beyond.

APMN's mission, organisational structure and outputs provide clear, real-world expressions of constructive journalism techniques. Because APMN operates outside tight commercial news cycles and deliberately links academia, activism and community media, it can embed solutions orientation, future orientation, inclusiveness, empowerment, contextual watchdogging and experimental impact evaluation into its work in ways that mainstream commercial outlets often cannot. APMN thus represents a practical model of how CJ techniques can be institutionalised: not as ephemeral 'good news' pieces, but as rigorous, community-engaged, accountable journalism that strengthens democratic participation across the Asia-Pacific region.

References

- Ahearn, S. (2022, March 17). How China is winning the information war in the Pacific. *The Strategist*. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/how-china-is-winning-the-information-war-in-the-pacific/>.
- APMN (n.d.). <https://www.facebook.com/PacificJournalismReview>
- Asia Pacific Media Network (n.d.). Mission. <https://asiapacificmedianetwork.memberful.com/>
- Asia Pacific Report* (2023, April 23). Asia Pacific media network plans wider community brief. <https://asiapacificreport.nz/2023/04/15/asia-pacific-media-network-plans-wider-community-brief/>
- Asia Pacific Report* (2024, July 11). Amid decline in mainstream media trust, *Pacific Journalism Review* remains a beacon. <https://asiapacificreport.nz/2024/07/11/amid-decline-in-mainstream-media-trust-pacific-journalism-review-remains-a-beacon/>
- Asia New Zealand Foundation (n.d.). Asia New Zealand Foundation against North & South Media Council—ASIA NEW ZEALAND FOUNDATION AGAINST NORTH & SOUTH Broadcasting Standards Authority. (2024, September 10). *Half of diverse audiences avoid broadcasts due to experience with harmful content*. <https://www.bsa.govt.nz/news/bsa-news/half-of-diverse-audiences-avoid-broadcasts-due-to-experience-with-harmful-content/>
- Constructive Institute. (2024). Research overview: What are the effects of constructive journalism? <https://constructiveinstitute.org/research-overview-effects/>

MEDIA CONSTRUCT, CONSTRUCTIVE MEDIA

- Craymer, L. (2024a, February 28). Warner Bros Discovery plans to close New Zealand TV news provider. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/warner-bros-discovery-plans-close-new-zealand-tv-news-provider-2024-02-28/>
- Craymer, L. (2024b, April 16). New Zealand's Stuff Group to produce news programme after Warner Bros Discovery closes newsroom. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/new-zealands-stuff-group-produce-news-programme-after-warner-bros-discovery-2024-04-16/>
- Craymer, L. (2025, June 30). New Zealand halts Cook Islands funding over China row. New Zealand halts Cook Islands funding over China row. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/new-zealand-halts-cook-islands-funding-over-china-row-2025-06-18/>
- Corlett, E. (2025, May 21). Pacific must not become a 'military zone' amid rise of China, New Zealand's deputy PM warns. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/21/winston-peters-new-zealand-deputy-pm-pacific-china-influence>
- Gleim, K. O., Williams, K., & Stroud, S. R. (2022, October 31). Can journalists also be activists? Center for Media Engagement. <https://mediaengagement.org/research/can-journalists-also-be-activists/>
- Goodenough, F., Rupar, V., & Kurian, P. (2024). *Diversity and news media in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Report). Inclusive Aotearoa Collective Tāhono. https://inclusiveaotearoa.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Diversity-and-news-media-in-Aoteaora-New-Zealand.Report_Goodenough-Rupar-Kurian.pdf
- Heinrichs, E., Ehrenberg, K., & Tillmann, P. (2022). *Constructive opportunities and challenges: Journalism in times of war*. Bonn Institute.
- Hermans, L. (2025). *The SAGE encyclopedia of journalism—Constructive journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781544391199.n99>
- Hermans, L., & Gyldensted, C. (2018). Elements of constructive journalism: Characteristics, practical application and audience valuation. *Journalism*, 20(4), 535–551. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918770537>
- Heyes, R. (2024, August 29). NZ's changing Asian population. *Infometrics*. <https://economics.infometrics.co.nz/article/2024-08-nzs-changing-asian-population>
- Irvine, H., & Morgan, W. (2021, November 4). Chinese and Indian New Zealanders' media use in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2021. NZ On Air. <https://www.nzonair.govt.nz/news/chinese-and-indian-new-zealanders-media-use-aotearoa-new-zealand-2021/>
- Jaung, R., Park, L. S., Park, J.; Mayeda, D., & Song, C. (2022). Asian New Zealanders' experiences of racism during the COVID-19 pandemic and its association with life satisfaction. *New Zealand Medical Journal*, 62-73. ISSN 1175-8716 <https://journal.nzma.org.nz/>
- Jørgensen, K. L., & Risbro, J. (October 2021). *Handbook of constructive journalism*. Constructive Institute. <https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/A-Handbook-for-Constructive-Journalism-IMS-and-CI-2022.pdf>
- Loto, R., Hodgetts, D., Chamberlain, K., Nikora, L., Karapu, E., & Barnett, A. (2006). Pasifika in the news: The portrayal of Pacific peoples in the New Zealand press. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 16, 100 -118. Wiley InterScience. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.848>
- Lofgren, E. (2023, April 28). Constructive journalism: What it is and how to do it. *The Fix it Media*. <https://thefix.media/2023/04/28/constructive-journalism-what-it-is-and-how-to-do-it/>
- Lu, D. (2025, August 28). 'Leadership looks white': Asians struggling to land senior roles. RNZ News. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/chinese/571301/leadership-looks->

- white-asians-struggling-to-land-senior-roles
- Media Helping Media. (n.d.). Journalism and activism: Are journalism and activism compatible? <https://mediahelpingmedia.org/advanced/are-journalism-and-activism-compatible/>
- McIntyre, K., & Gyldensted, C. (2017). Constructive journalism: Applying positive psychology techniques to news production. *The Journal of Media Innovations* 4.2, 20-34. <https://scispace.com/pdf/constructive-journalism-an-introduction-and-practical-guide-28ncc70dpl.pdf>
- Myllylahti, M. (2024). New Zealand: An unregulated, concentrated, and financially fragile media system. In Schapals, A.K. and C. Pentzold (Eds.), *Media compass: A companion to international media landscapes* (pp. 483-493). Wiley.
- Myllylahti, M. & Treadwell, G. (2025). Trust in news in Aotearoa New Zealand 2025. AUT research centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy (JMAD). https://www.jmadresearch.com/_files/ugd/a95e86_be69ce3448e64af4969c09df872454e9.pdf
- NZ On Air. (2021, November 4). Asian creatives and women directors under-represented in local screen projects. <https://www.nzonair.govt.nz/news/NZ-On-Air-Diversity-Report-2021/>
- Oliver, P. (2007, June 11). Press Council condemns ‘Asian angst’ story. *The New Zealand Herald*. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/press-council-condemns-asian-angst-story/UX5JDZEKBJOZ3E4N3NF4RMV2S4/>
- Ollrog, M., Hanisch, M., & Rook, A. (2021). When newspeople get constructive: An editorial study on implementing Constructive Reporting at Verlagsgruppe Rhein Main. <https://journalistik.online/en/paper-en/when-newspeople-get-constructive/>
- Pacific Journalism Review*—APMN (n.d.). <https://www.facebook.com/PacificJournalismReview/about>
- Pacific Journalism Review* (n.d.). *Pacific Journalism Review: Te Koako* <https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/pacific-journalism-review/>
- Pacific Media* (n.d.). <https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/pacific-media-monographs/pmm/index>
- Pacific Media Centre Annual Review (2020). Mission statement. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363294477_Pacific_Media_Centre_Annual_Review_2020
- Pearson, S., & Kothari, S. (2022, June 29). Asian New Zealanders and the media: New study. University of Auckland, Faculty of Arts. <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/news/2022/06/29/asian-nz-media-representation.html>
- Robie, D. (2018). Bearing Witness 2017: Year 2 of a Pacific climate change storytelling project. *Pacific Journalism Review: Te Koako*, 24(1), 155-177. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v24i1.415>
- Robie, D. (2019). Karoronga, kele’a, talanoa, tapoetethakot and va: Expanding millennial notions of a ‘Pacific way’ journalism education and media research culture. *Media Asia*, 46(1–2), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2019.1601409>
- Robie, D. (2022a). Media and academia: The intriguing case of the Pacific Media Centre. *Media Asia*, 50(2), 286–298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2022.2118802>
- Robie, D. (2022b). Journalism education ‘truth’ challenges: An age of growing hate, intolerance and disinformation. *Pacific Journalism Review: Te Koako*, 28(1 & 2), 29-46. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v28i1and2.1240>
- Robie, D. (2023). Voice of the voiceless: The Pacific Media Centre as a case study of academic and research advocacy and activism. *Okinawan Journal of Island Studies*, 4(2), 27-52. DOI 10.24564/0002019736
- Stats NZ. (May 29, 2024). 2023 Census population counts (by ethnic group, age, and Māori descent) and dwelling counts. 2023 Census population counts (by ethnic group, age, and Māori descent) and dwelling counts | Stats NZ

- van Antwerpen, N., & Fielding, V. (2023). Constructive journalism: Techniques for improving the practice of objectivity. *Journal of Media Ethics*, 38(3), 176–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23736992.2023.2228313>
- van Antwerpen, N., & Hermans, L. (2025). It's more of a mindset: Journalism professionals' perceptions and experiences of constructive journalism. *The Netherlands Abstract Journalism*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849251331>
- Walton, J., & Truong, M. (2022). A review of the model minority myth: Understanding the social, educational and health impacts. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 46(3), 391–419. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2022.2121170>
- Whaley, D. (2025, August 1). Once, newspapers ruled Auckland's suburbs. Now they're almost all gone. *The Spinoff*. <https://thespinoff.co.nz/media/01-08-2025/once-newspapers-ruled-aucklands-suburbs-now-theyre-almost-all-gone>

Khairiah A Rahman is senior lecturer at the School of Communication Studies, Auckland University of Technology (AUT). She has served on several advisory boards including the Pacific Media Centre, Meta's Aotearoa News Innovation Advisory Group and the Centre for Research Excellence on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism. In 2021, The department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet invited Rahman to talk on the impact of media in countering terrorism. Rahman's research intersects media, representations of marginalised communities, social cohesion, crisis and communication paradigms.
krahman@aut.ac.nz

Adam Brown holds a PhD from the University of Edinburgh, and has taught at tertiary institutions in the United Kingdom, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Before retirement, he was head of business and director of research at Auckland Institute of Studies. His research covers various topics within linguistics, communication, English language, and English language teaching, especially pronunciation. He has (co-) authored and (co-) edited 18 books and two monographs. He is also a committee member of the Asia Pacific Media Network (APMN).
adambrownbrown@hotmail.com