


THE AUSTRALIAN

Wednesday, May 24, 2023 | Today's Paper | Mind Games

ABC staff lead 'false' claims against News

By JAMES MADDEN
MEDIA EDITOR

When you follow someone, you'll see their latest stories on your homepage in the 'Following' section. 

11:20AM MAY 24, 2023 •  59 COMMENTS

High-profile figures at the ABC and multiple mainstream media outlets have been exposed peddling false claims about the extent of News Corp's reporting of [the national broadcaster's coronation coverage controversy](#), in the wake of [Stan Grant's decision](#) to step away from television.

On Saturday, Guardian Australia erroneously reported there had been more than 150 mentions of the ABC's "coronation coverage" and "Stan Grant" by The Australian and Sky News in the two weeks since the broadcast.

The unverified figure of "more than 150 articles" has been repeatedly quoted in recent days by The Sydney Morning Herald, online news outlet Crikey and [ABC journalists](#), including Radio National Breakfast host Patricia Karvelas, among many others.

Independent research commissioned by this masthead on Tuesday revealed The Australian published just 15 articles on the subject (nine stories appeared in both print and online, with a further six published online only) between May 6 and May 20.

Sky News mentioned the subjects 63 times between May 6 and May 20, but that includes some occasions on which the key words were mentioned multiple times in the same program or news item, according to Stream.

Despite the modest number of published articles about the matter, the ABC continues to publicly push a narrative that it is “under attack” from News Corp, publisher of The Australian.

“Sections of the media, particularly in News Limited (sic), will do anything they can to campaign against the ABC,” said the broadcaster’s director of news, Justin Stevens, on Monday.

News Corp Australasia executive chairman Michael Miller publicly called out Stevens, suggesting on Tuesday the ABC news boss should redirect his fixation with rival media outlets to the serious “internal problems” at the national broadcaster – namely, shocking allegations of entrenched racism within the publicly funded organisation.

“The ABC needs to stop passing the buck and blaming others for its own internal problems,” Mr Miller said on Tuesday.

“ABC director of news Justin Stevens has made a raft of unsubstantiated claims about News Corp’s reporting of how the ABC covered the coronation, and the ensuing fallout that Stan Grant says contributed to his decision to stand down as host of Q+A. Mr Stevens’ misleading claims are being repeated across the various broadcast arms of the ABC, and he should correct the record.”

The bogus reporting by the Guardian, which other media outlets failed to independently verify before republishing, also provoked ill-informed accusations by others including Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young, who tweeted on Monday: “Let’s be clear, News Corp has fuelled the relentless racist onslaught of Stan Grant. This is what they do – go after individuals, whip the haters into a frenzy and sit back while good people are torn down.”

The Australian approached Senator Hanson-Young to ask if she could cite evidence to back up her claims, but did not hear back.

Guardian Australia has since acknowledged its weekend article was based on “third-party data” from an unidentified source. Its amendment reads: “An earlier version

stated that the data about the number of mentions of the ABC's coronation coverage by The Australian and Sky News ... since the broadcast was obtained from media monitoring firm Stream. We wish to clarify that the information was not provided to the Guardian by Stream but obtained from a third-party source."

The Australian asked the ABC if it was the "third party" that provided the data, but did not receive a response. The Australian asked the Guardian if its decision to run a story based on data from an unnamed source was in keeping with its editorial standards, but did not receive a reply.

On the ABC's Media Watch on Monday night, host John Barron said the trend of "star journalists" such as Grant using the national broadcaster as a platform to espouse their own personal views was an issue senior management needed to address. "The ABC should also review the way it encourages some of its star journalists to walk the impossible line of news, analysis and opinion, and whether that is in line with public expectations."

His critique echoed that of former senior ABC journalists Stuart Littlemore and David Salter, who wrote an opinion piece published in the Nine mastheads on Monday: "The ABC has catastrophically undermined its authority and independence by permitting journalists to post personal commentary on the corporation's digital outlets, and to parade their egos on social media. By failing to draw clear contractual guidelines for ABC staff, whether on-air or not, the corporation has abandoned a longstanding policy that ensured impartiality."

Barron also reported on Monday night that the ABC has now received more than 1700 complaints from viewers about the public broadcaster's coverage of the coronation, with many registering dissatisfaction with the timing of anti-monarchy comments made by Grant as the coronation service was about to take place.

News Corp was not the only media outlet that pursued the story of ABC viewers' fierce reaction to its coronation coverage.

Neil Mitchell, morning show host on Nine's Melbourne radio 3AW, on May 8 said: "The ABC got it wrong again. Totally misread the mood. Anybody watch the ABC coverage at the start? They had a four-person panel in the lead-up. Three of them, republicans. So they're talking over the footage of this grand ceremony being prepared, souring the mood.

“There’s a debate there to have about a republic. But during live coverage of a coronation was not the time. You know, I really wonder sometimes why we feed these ABC people.”

On the same day, Sydney radio 2GB breakfast host Ben Fordham said: “When people tune in to watch the coronation, they’re not expecting lectures about the monarchy and about the commonwealth. But that’s what they got on the ABC from the likes of Stan Grant.” Fordham’s stablemate, Ray Hadley, said: “It’s just not the platform for it, there’s no dignity attached to it.”

The Australian also approached the editors of The Sydney Morning Herald and Crikey for comment on their publication of the Guardian’s unverified data, but did not receive responses.

Late on Tuesday night, an ABC spokesperson replied: “We have analysed the data today and the figure is 148 mentions ... across some News Corp mastheads and Sky News ... However, this does not include all mastheads and will likely be higher. The Australian is the main source of mentions in both print and online.”

Stevens emailed a response late on Tuesday, although did not directly address whether he was trying to divert attention from the ABC’s internal problems by publicly attacking other media outlets. “If Mr Miller is interested, I’d welcome a private meeting with (him) if he’s amenable to have a constructive discussion about how our organisations can come together to fight abuse of journalists in our industry,” he said.

JAMES MADDEN, MEDIA EDITOR

James Madden has worked for The Australian for over 20 years. As a reporter, he covered courts, crime and politics in Sydney and Melbourne. James was previously Sydney chief of staff, deputy national chief of staff... [Read more](#)



Topics

[The Royal Family](#) / [News Corp](#) / [Abc](#)

TRENDING

**We stand with Stan?
Give us a break. Stand
for quality journalism**



**All the ways Victoria
squandered its world-
class system**



By JANET ALBRECHTSEN, TOM SWITZER

By ROBERT GOTTLIEBSEN

Stan Grant let down by the ABC, not other media outlets

By EDITORIAL



'T20 mode': Modi hails migration, labour deal

By BEN PACKHAM



Top cop under fire over LinkedIn 'like'

By REMY VARGA, KRISTIN SHORTEN



A voice is the first step towards a better future

By MARCUS STEWART

