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EDITORIAL

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‘One should always suspect that one governs too much’. This is how Michel Foucault described the modern liberal mindset in his 1978-9 lectures at the Collège de France (2008, p. 319). Such a call appears to have been heard by the authors of Australia’s recent Convergence Review (2012), which proposes a series of changes to the Australian Government’s policies on media technology, content and regulation. The issue of media ownership has been on the global agenda for some time (e.g. McChesney and Schiller, 2003), and this Review gives a local example of tensions worldwide between freedom and control in media policy.

While the Government’s response to the Review is not due for some months, several points made in the review are worth commenting on here. The Final Report gives three justifications for the regulation of media by governments: to ensure that concentration of media ownership does not impede the free flow of information; to protect community standards with relation to content; and to protect Australian content from the vagaries of the market (Convergence Review, 2012, p. viii). Its three key recommendations are that media policy be framed in a ‘technology neutral’ way (p. 42); that barriers to entry into the market should be reduced (with the exception of perpetually scarce spectrum; see pp. 88-101); and that the targets of media policy should be defined according to size and reach rather than by organizational structure or ownership (and a graph of these ‘content service enterprises’ appears on p. 12).

Structures of media ownership and patterns of content have long been of interest to the field of media and communications, but the issues of technology and design are becoming increasingly important to our understanding of what media can do, and what people can do with media. This issue of Platform hopes to provide a valuable contribution to discussions around the role of media policy, public communications and political organisation in the present moment.

Maria Bora’s article explores the interactions between technological developments and media policy through a study of the failure of interactive television (iTV) in Australia. A difficult regulatory environment, expensive hardware and a lack of faithful collaboration
between platform developers caused the failure of iTV in the period under investigation. Bora’s research finds that contemporary media regulations strongly favoured existing players and discouraged risky investment in new media platforms. Development of new set-top-box standards was inhibited by established providers like Foxtel. In addition, sites such as YouTube in some ways rendered the question of interactive television moot. These sites – and proprietary catch-up services like ABC’s iView – enable the capturing of audience feedback, engagement and labour promised by iTV. Whether the Convergence Review will inspire renewed enthusiasm for interactive broadcast technologies remains to be seen. In any case, historical studies of technological failure like Bora’s (and, e.g. Krapp, 2011) continue to make fascinating reading and to productively complicate the trajectories of new media theory.

The public role of communication is a focus of Maria Fleming’s article “Indian international student safety in Melbourne 2009-10 and the Victoria police – the development of a crisis and the frameworks that propelled it,” which analyses the reaction of Victoria Police to a series of assaults on international students. Through a discussion of media releases and news articles, Fleming finds that, far from mitigating the crisis of confidence in Victoria Police, statements made by then Chief Commissioner Simon Overland contributed to the unease of Indian students in Australia and the Indian community at large. At stake in the Victoria Police media releases is the question of truth: who is in possession of ‘the facts’? Whose testimony is to be trusted? Was Victoria Police responding sufficiently to the rise in assaults on Indian students? Fleming argues that by positioning himself as an expert above the lay opinions of the Indian community, and seeking to ‘correct’ the misperceptions of the community, Overland exacerbated the problem. More recent responses, such as the ‘Think Before’ campaign, acknowledge risks to students and offer tools for safer travel. It is important to recognise that not only must people be safe but they must also feel safe; and to attend to the always-unequal distribution of social risks (Beck, 1992, p. 121).

We are also pleased to present in this issue an interview with Jodi Dean, Professor of Political Science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, New York. Dean has written widely on media networks and politics, including monographs on blogging, communicational capitalism and the political theory of Slavoj Žižek. Her recent writings have focused on the difficulties of conceiving of a digital media public sphere. In this interview, conducted and introduced by Sebastian Kubitschko, Dean unpacks her ideas on communicative capitalism, symbolic efficiency, Actor Network Theory and capacities for organisation. Her recent writing and speaking about and with the Occupy movement provides an example of the possibility of resistance in a thoroughly mediated world.

Our thanks are due first of all to our contributors, without whom we would not have a journal. Our journal manager, Dale Leorke, has been a constant source of support throughout the production of this issue. And, of course, we would like to thank each of our peer reviewers for the time they have taken to review the articles included in this issue.

In 2010, Platform collaborated with the Australia New Zealand Communication Association (ANZCA) to produce a special issue. We are happy to again be working together, this time to present a selection of papers from ANZCA’s 2011 conference. Shujie (Phoebe) Guo, PhD candidate at the University of Waikato and ANZCA postgraduate representative, introduces this special section below.

ANZCA and PLATFORM Collaboration

It is a great pleasure to present the second collaboration between PLATFORM: Journal of Media and Communication and ANZCA. ANZCA is a professional association for re-
searchers, students and teachers working in the broad field of communication and media studies. Its conference is held annually in either Australia or Aotearoa New Zealand. To support the work of new and emerging scholars, ANZCA provides post-graduate students with opportunities to publish the best papers submitted to the ANZCA conference. This special issue of PLATFORM presents four of the best student-authored papers from the 2011 ANZCA Conference which was jointly hosted by the Department of Management Communication (MCOM) and the Screen & Media Studies Program at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. These papers were carefully selected by reviewers who are members of the ANZCA Executive to reflect interesting and important topics centred around the theme of the conference, ‘Communication on the edge: Shifting boundaries and identities’.

Among these four contributors, Anna Jackson, in her paper ‘Inertia and turbulence: Television and innovation in New Zealand’s documentary production ecology’, examines New Zealand’s documentary production ecology, identifying the challenges that have slowed the adoption of the new platforms and technologies, and the development of New Zealand’s media ecology. Deepti Azariah, in her paper ‘Beyond the blog: The networked self of travel bloggers on Twitter’, explores how independent travel bloggers employ specific features and narrative techniques of Twitter to maintain the positions of bloggers and extend a networked self. Eleanor Sandry draws on examples of human-robot interactions, in her piece ‘Dancing around with robots: Ethical communication as a triple audi-ovisual reality’, to interpret communication as a dynamic process relying on a triple audi-ovisual reality that values difference rather than commonality. The last paper ‘Shifting online: An exploratory study into PR consultants’ attitude towards new media’, co-contributed by Katharina Wolf and Catherine Archer, investigates the cautious move of public relations consultants in Western Australia towards applying new media tools for their clients and themselves.

These papers make topical contributions to different angles of communication and media research, demonstrating varied interpretations of the conference theme. More significantly, these contributors capture the spirit of communication at the cutting edge of a rapidly changing world merging with new media and communication tools, channels, and technologies. Their papers inspire us to consider the impact of such changes on our everyday life, communities and organisations. ANZCA, along with PLATFORM, will continue to value the important role of graduate research in the communication and media field, and to provide platforms for post-graduates to contribute their voices.

References


GENERAL SECTION
THE BARRIERS FOR PROLIFERATION OF
INTERACTIVE TELEVISION (iTV) IN
AUSTRALIA IN THE PERIOD 1999-2007

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Abstract: Interactive television (iTV) could well be described as a rising research area. The digitalization of networks, as well as broadband penetration, makes it once again a contemporary issue. However, it can hardly be called an overworked area of Australian television studies. This article assesses multiple reasons behind the Australian failure to adopt this technology in the period 1999-2007. iTV did not open feasible revenue streams for broadcasters. Its role was complementary to the digital TV services offered by current incumbent providers. The interactive potential of the Internet supported by users’ engagement started to fulfill the promises of iTV and offered more collaborative service propositions. Still, at this point, neither TV nor the Internet provides fully viable business models for iTV. Instead there has been a flux of online and offline revenue models and continuing uncertainty about the future of media.

Keywords: interactive television (iTV), trails, barriers, regulations, Internet, business models

INTRODUCTION

Defining iTV proved to be difficult assignment. A number of authors (see e.g. Carey, 1997; Stewart, 1999; Van Dijk & De Vos, 2001; Kim and Sawney, 2002) state that there has not been a compromise over the definition of iTV and indicate reasons and consequences (e.g. Galperin, 2002; Kim and Sawney, 2002; Chirianopolous and Lekakos, 2007). The title ‘Interactive television’ refers more to a historical moment than to the real nature of the media. In general iTV merges computing power, broadcast, mobile technologies and broadband Internet, providing users with on demand interactive content and applications. Thus iTV could now be defined as “interactive audio-visual content” (McQuire, 2009) which is not tied to any service or platform but relates to the users’ experience that involves at least one user and one or more network devices (Lekakos et al., 2008).

The concept of interactive television (iTV) is not new in Australia. Academic discussion about iTV started in Australia in the 1980s. Significant technological changes (manifes-
ted in rapid development of microprocessors, as well as transmission and switching technologies with large storage capacity and low costs) coincided with tendencies toward gradual deregulation of world economies, government reforms and privatization of telecommunications encouraged wider social debate about the Australian role in the future information society (see e.g. Barr, 1987). To keep up with international trends the Australian government in the 1980s initiated a number of reports about videotex (e.g. ASTEC 1983; South Australian Council on Technological Change 1983; Logica 1986) such as those which followed the introduction of Viettel Telecom’s public videotex offered by Commonwealth Bank and applications of videotex in agriculture and distance education (e.g. Hosie, 1985; Castro, 1986).

In the 1990s there was a lack of well structured industry reports and studies about iTV as well as lack of locally organized iTV academic conferences which would promote new media and encourage broader academic interests. The exceptions were for example two seminars organized by Network Insight Institute (RMIT Research Group) in 1999 and 2001. Still, the Interactive Television Institute (ITRI) at Murdoch University has produced a number of research projects and theses – such as these about children’s interactive programming, digital interactive TV advertising – and applications of iTV on tourism and community services. Despite the Institutes’ active participation in a number of digital policy studies and Parliamentary submissions (e.g. ITRI 2005) their primary focus has been on commercial research of consumer behaviour and advertising practices for a number of international clients such as General Motors, Turner Broadcasting, Coca-Cola and Nike Inc.

The possibilities of convergence of digital content, broadband Internet and mobile devices and the aspiration of media practitioners to renew their television charters, preserve competitiveness and boost revenue streams, initiated a number of articles and research projects regarding SMS mediated TV events, mobile iTV applications, multiplatform services and video on demand (see Beros 2004; Nightingale and Dwyer 2006; Spurgeon and Goggin 2007).

Overall, interactive TV applications have been discussed in the context of particular formats, levels of audience participation or proliferation of specific services, but not in the context of conditions which need to be met to secure iTV proliferation in the Australian market. Mostly, industry reports on iTV provided a short-sighted analysis of current trends rather than a comprehensive analysis of causes and consequences based on particular theoretical frameworks. As a result an incomplete picture may be gained and possible alternative solutions would be left out.

This article is aimed at achieving understanding of the aspects which influenced the barriers for proliferation of iTV services and applications at the beginning of 2000s. It is comprised of four major sections: the first part briefly describes research methods and data collection. The second section summarizes iTV trials. The third section of article explains technical, regulatory and financial barriers for proliferation of services. And the forth section analyses influence of Internet on proliferation of iTV.

The conclusion of this article is: The anti-competitive broadcasting policies supported with unsolved technological issues, financial disadvantages and wider proliferation of Internet influenced slow take up of iTV. In general, existing iTV services were characterized by limited interactivity and controlled closed platforms which failed to meet the expectations of providers and potential audiences. Despite advantages in comparison with broadcast offerings, the Internet had not been able to bring TV providers the same amount of revenue, or to ensure quality of content. In general the period under discussion reveals that neither TV or the Internet have yet provided viable business models for iTV.
**RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION**

As a research method I have chosen a survey because of the lack of data about history of iTV in Australia. The survey was conducted in the period between November 2006 and April 2007. The overall purpose of the survey was to examine the perception and attitudes of Australian iTV practitioners and emphasize the need to gain information of a particular “moment” in the development of media.

The survey was carried out within the scope of the Australian Interactive Media Industry Association (AIMIA) membership list which represents a broad spectrum of interactive media providers in Australia. The AIMIA is maybe the only association which currently provides a near-inclusive database of Australian iTV providers, despite the fact that some of the biggest iTV practitioners are not AIMIA members (such as Channel 7 or the Interactive Television Research Institute). AIMIA’s directory of iTV practitioners does not completely represent all features of the iTV industry in Australia but provides consistent data which could characterize the iTV sector. The six interviews with non- AIMIA iTV providers have made additional contributions to the realistic picture of perspectives for iTV in Australia.

The questionnaire included 26 closed questions which were sequenced by topics and did not take more than 30-40 minutes for participants to complete. The questionnaire was organized around three topics: driving forces, iTV barriers, and potential users. The barriers to proliferation of iTV were measured through questions concerning the perceived advantages and disadvantages in offering iTV.

An emailed survey was distributed to 122 potential participants. The response rate was about 49%. Data collection was conducted through a self-completion questionnaire with a URL link to the website provided for further information about the project (for greater detail, see Jakovljevic, 2010).

**SUMMARY OF iTV TRIALS**

The technological, economic and regulatory ‘seachanges’ embedded in a liberal economic paradigm were gathering international momentum in the 1990s promising modernization and prosperity of cable, satellite and telecommunication systems with progressive encouragement of private investments and capitalization of mergers and transnational corporations. The Australian television industry became more intensely influenced by international acquisitions which as a consequence brought about the introduction of the first iTV trials.

The first trials of iTV (started in 1999 by Austar) were prologues for the commercial launch of iTV services which were supposed to recover newly established pay TV investments, decrease churn, and assist subscription providers to successfully compete with free to air (FTA) offers. At the time the advertising industry saw an opportunity to closely target TV users through iTV, delivering more personalized advertisements and provide more accountability for their advertising campaigns.

By 2005 all pay TV providers (Optus, Foxtel and Austar) conducted their first iTV trials. Not long ago after these trials the biggest pay TV provider, Foxtel, became the dominant provider of interactive applications. The competition was defeated by Foxtel’s cooperative activities with Sky Digital and opponents’ technological and financial disadvantages. This allowed Foxtel to exercise a monopoly and through market manoeuvres forced Austar and Optus to become only resellers of Foxtel’s platform and content.
The commercial and public service broadcasters (PSBs), on the other hand, did not carry out iTV trials, but they were engaged with interactive applications in a financially less demanding manner and from a different perspective than pay TV providers.

Generally, there was a difference between the commercial broadcasters and pay TV and PSBs in their overarching attitude toward iTV: pay operators regarded iTV as an add-on to existing programming and advertising, while commercial broadcasters saw it as a challenge to their business models. In the middle there were PSBs, who showed genuine interest for iTV services. The ABC, for example, has prioritized local content and made some of the most creative interactive programs and the most appealing to a young generation of digital technology savvy users.

In general, investments in iTV trials or only particular applications and services did not bring the expected financial rewards to any of the providers. Instead iTV’s role was complementary to the already established digital offers. Further investigation was needed to reveal what were the general obstacles for proliferation of media and where potential opportunities were suited. There are three major reasons for failure of trials: technological, regulatory and financial.

**TECHNOLOGICAL BARRIERS**

*Return path and set-top boxes (STBs)*

For a platform to be fully interactive it needs to have a return path which allows user data to be sent back to broadcasters and vice versa. A return path enables broadcasters and content producers to generate what they call “interconnect revenues” (Carter and Wright, 2003) through a one-to-one relationship with users. Most STBs deployed in the Australian market at the beginning of the 2000s were either analogue or low-functionality digital STBs. Only a small number of these boxes had a return path which could enable two-way interactivity.

In addition, satellite and digital terrestrial television (DTTV) platforms do not have an inherent return path available for interactive applications. In comparison with cable and xDSL which have return paths as a standard, platforms which use wireless transmission (such as terrestrial and satellite) often use a dial up phone network which is small in comparison with cable and xDSL (Torok, 2004).

Yet it is important to emphasise that the lack of return path did not completely block the appearance of interactivity between programs and audiences. Even with a limited return path, where data is cached using a phone network via a modem in the STB, the interactive viewing experience can be enhanced. However while a dial-up phone network return path provides revenue generation within iTV, it cannot provide advanced interactive applications (see Brown and Pickard, 2004). True interactive services, such as multiple video streaming, are only possible on a terrestrial platform.

The establishment of two-way interactivity using terrestrial STBs has been related to a willingness of all providers to collaborate and work together for mutual benefits. One of the conclusions from the Network Insight 2002 “Seminar on iTV and Datacasting” (Barns, 2002), was that the industry should work together regarding STB issues and understand what is useful for the market as a whole. Developing a centralized iTV infrastructure would be a win-win situation for everyone. Many of the iTV providers were temporarily willing to sacrifice control in exchange for a reduction in costs and the possibility of gaining a wider audience. However, collaboration regarding STBs was adversely affected by a horizontal
pay TV market using technologically advanced boxes, as well as the general stand of Foxtel which did not want to let go of an already established domination of the STB market.

In addition, the failure of the government to promote competition in new digital TV services caused STB manufacturers to wait for applications to be developed before they committed to producing STBs. This caused a so called ‘chicken and egg’ problem. From one side, development of iTV applications was not financially feasible without adequate STBs, while, on the other side, manufacturers were not willing to start the mass production of STBs until applications were available. As a consequence iTV experiments remained marginal compared to the Internet as a platform for interactive content.

**DIGITAL TERRESTRIAL TELEVISION (DTTV) PLATFORM**

The strategies of broadcasters toward iTV are in one way dependent upon their digital terrestrial television (DTTV) platform, the technological characteristics of digital terrestrial platform, and the regulatory provisions surrounding it which helped to shape the optimism or pessimism of providers towards the proliferation of iTV applications. “In general the DTTV platform has been taken up by Australian households more slowly than pay TV or even DVD, although it was less expensive than both” (Jones, 2007). Yet, fewer households had access to a DTTV platform in the period between 2001 and 2005 than was the case for pay TV.

Despite the DTTV platform’s obvious advantages over the analogue platform (see Given, 2002), it also has lots of disadvantages in terms of interactivity in comparison with cable and satellite. According to Ian Carroll (in Barns, 2002, p.12) then ABC Head of multi-channel TV, the DTTV platform was not well positioned to meet the entry requirements necessary for the penetration of iTV applications because there was no DTTV platform operator to manage and sell extra bandwidth, run back-channels, and the only models for the provision of STB have been via retail instead of platform operators. One year after the commencement of the DTTV platform in 2002, there were no integrated interactive STBs commercially available. Lack of interactivity from the PSBs on their DTTV platform on the other side force them to produce and broadcast interactive digital content on pay TV provider platforms.

Accordingly PSBs turned toward a multiple platforms approach to promote iTV applications and enhanced services. For example ABC’s “Fat Cow Motel” (http://www.abc.net.au/tv/fatcowmotel/) created in 2002 was Australia’s first interactive multi-platform drama which was broadcast via television, with extensions of the TV show available through its interactive applications on the ABC channel on Austar, on the Internet, email, voicemail and SMS. Marshall (2003) noticed that audiences responded overwhelmingly to the Fat Cow Motel concept, despite a complex technical and narrative focus on interactivity, because they could engage with content as they liked and because the ‘reality’ of the “Fat Cow world” was maintained across all platforms and throughout the marketing.

**GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS**

Government regulations have unsurprisingly proved crucial in the development of a commercial environment which can support the production and distribution of interactive services. The introduction of the first iTV trials was parallel with the introduction of the first digital TV legislation in 1998 (see Given, 2003; Bosland, 2006) and its first revisions which in a direct way influenced the deployment of iTV.

The legislation was widely criticised as being restrictive and highly protective of in-
cumbent broadcasters, and not stimulating the introduction of new digital services (see e.g. Papandrea, 2006). The following section will examine major aspects of DTV legislation regarding iTV such as datacasting, competition and diversity and broadband access technologies.

**Datacasting**

Datacasting in Australia was a special category of service created through legislation (e.g. Datacasting Act 2000). Defined not by technology but by content type, (Morton, 2003), datacasting was something that existing TV broadcasters could choose to do with their digital spectrum, in addition to the digital broadcasting they were required to do, but only if they paid the government extra for it (Given, 2003, p.170). Datacasting, if commercially viable, could provide users with a wide range of information services such as teletext, heath and lifestyle information, traffic and travel, educational material and so on. Equally, the interactivity possible under datacasting could influence changes in viewing habits and overall encouraged development of consumer needs for interactivity across all markets.

However, many datacasting services had a direct relationship with broadcasting services but could not be offered as a standalone commercial offering by new datacasters. The Datacasting Act 2000 legislation did not provide clear guidelines for potential datacasters to distinguish what they practically could offer to the market and what was prohibited (see Given, 2003). Varan (1999) proposed a definition of datacasting based on inherent interactivity which potentially could advance datacasting services. It could also have the additional effect of stimulating Australian iTV production in the emerging international market for iTV content.

Even if datacasting was defined in terms of interactivity, however, datacasting could not be a wise business solution for broadcasters, because of datacasting genre restrictions. “These genre restrictions were deliberately enshrined in legislation to afford a strong degree of protection for the existing traditional free-to-air broadcasters” (Morton, 2003). The types of programs and services that datacasters were allowed to provide were not in direct competition with entertainment-based mainstream broadcasting. They just complemented broadcasting services and provided additional reasons for the audience to convert to digital. Thus harsh restrictions on datacasting held back the marketability of interactive digital services both from a user’s and broadcaster’s perspective.

All in all, the confusing practical application of datacasting regulations crippled iTV proliferation without providing any difference regarding digitalization of the Australian TV industry. In the end, most of the potential datacasters that originally registered to participate in the auction decided that the imposed restrictions undermined the commercial viability of datacasting, and withdrew from the process. In 2001 the Australian Federal government had to call off the datacasting licensing auction due to a lack of market Interest, especially from potential major bidders such as News Corporation and Telstra (see Datacasting in disarray, 2001).

**Competition and diversity**

According to Jakovljevic’s (2010) survey 53.4 % of her participants believed that stimulation of competition was the preferable government stance regarding iTV. The right mix of iTV services and content diversity with a competitively driven quality of applications should eventually attract the all important consumer base to iTV. Increase in competition potentially could lead to greater diversity of services and the entry of new players which, for many survey participants, is a crucial responsibility of the government.
Without new players, there was limited competition to increase the diversity of new interactive services. However the provisions for the transition to digital in Australia involved the prohibition of new players until 2007 and beyond. The government’s explanation for this restriction was “to ensure the commercial FTAs’ commitment to quality is retained, and to take into account the expensive transition to digital television” (Alston, 1998). This aspect of the digital decision has been widely criticized (see e.g Papandrea, 2001).

The Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (DTV) Act 2006 later brought reform of media, and some relaxation of cross-media regulations tackling primarily the diversity of media ownership, but also the regulatory power of the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) and the anti-siphoning regime which protects sporting events for FTA access (see Hitchens, 2007). A common argument saw the liberalization of cross-media rules as appropriate due to the rapid development of new media. By relaxing the restrictions on media ownership, more players will have an opportunity to compete more effectively, and this, in turn, will assist them to promote diversity in market. In iTV terms it means more opportunities for production of interactive content and creative rivalry among iTV providers.

Yet knowing that restrictions on commercial broadcasting services and multichanneling were relaxed three years later in 2009, it is hard to believe that the Government acknowledged that a key driver for the digital take up was a diverse choice of content and widely established competition. Given (2006) insists that new services were not a significant factor in the reform of media and not an important factor for the government to motivate the audience to purchase digital receivers. The improved picture quality was far more important than new digital services or interactivity.

The important segment of the DTV Act Amendment (2006) in regard to iTV was the proposal of two new digital channels – Channel A and Channel B – which were supposed to bring changes to the Australian digital environment and potentially bring interactivity to TV screens. Yet digital Channel A was restricted to niche programming and was only able to offer limited commercial content which was attractive to a broad audience.

On the other side, the flexibility of Digital Channel B depended upon how the content was received by a digital receiver or other devices such as mobile phones. Since there was a lack of control restrictions on Channel B, commercial television licensees simply re-packaged old content and, in that way, limited the scope of diversity (see Hitchens, 2007, p.15).

Thus, in terms of diversity of services, DTV Act Amendment did not stimulate production of interactive services. Instead they led to a concentration of main media, and only protected commercial players who already expressed concerns regarding digitalization, multichanneling and, in general, any strategic changes to the digital status quo. Reform of media and relaxation of cross-media regulations were not designed to stimulate new interactive services. Instead, anticompetitive rules continued constraining the wider introduction of iTV services.

**Broadband access technologies**

Broadband access technologies were major driving force for the current proliferation of iTV services (Jakovljevic, 2010). They are also heavily dependent upon the regulatory regime established by government. “Broadband allows much more content to be delivered over various ‘pipes’. This increases capacity, along with the addition of ‘back channel’ also
greatly increases the scope for interactivity” (Jacka, 2002). Thus delivery of high-speed bandwidth is crucial for the creation of interactive on demand customised applications and services as well as the convergence between television and other media. Broadband implementation depends upon different access arrangements between carriers and service/content providers, as well as the possibilities of users to access a range of services.

When open competition was introduced through the Telecommunications Act 1997 (Commonwealth), Part XIIb – The Telecommunications Industry: Anti-Competitive Conduct and Record-Keeping rules – and Part Xlc – Telecommunications Access Regime – were added to the Trade Practices Act 1974 (Commonwealth) to underpin open competition (Chavan and Raiche, 2008). Investment by new players in content and broadband was supposed to encourage incumbents to respond to competitive threats, by deploying new technologies such as iTV to protect established revenue streams and open new ones. Without potential competition, incumbents tend to delay the deployment of new technologies for as long as possible to extract the maximum rents from their existing investments. By 2001, new high capacity network such as TransACT fibre to the curb network, were being employed. However this was not without obstacles.

The limited access to broadband networks potentially caused media ownership concentration which according to Owen (2004) causes two broad policy concerns: “(1) the problem of market power, which can reduce output and raise prices, reducing both consumer and social economic welfare and (2) the problem of private restrictions of access by suppliers of content”.

Achieving open competition on the broadband market in practice has been a difficult task, due to many regions which are limited in their broadband options but also by the intention of the government to protect incumbent players. This was mostly in reference to Telstra’s dominance over the telecommunication infrastructure (see, for example, Centre for International Economics Canberra & Sydney, 2004) and the regulatory access regime’s failure to stimulate strong competition and encourage widely beneficial interconnection arrangements between Telstra and other provider.

Thus Telstra’s advantages in the broadband market were crucial for iTV deployment because Telstra, through prices and conditions which it dictated to users of its infrastructure, directly influenced the ability of these providers to create iTV applications and remain viable in the face of competition. For example Telstra’s high network access costs were a barrier to the proliferation of video-on-demand (VOD) which was considered to be iTV’s “killer application” (see Jakovljevic, 2010). Access costs were one of the key reasons why leading UK VOD players, Video Networks Ltd, has not entered the Australian market, despite having spent extensive time and resources on a feasibility study, hiring experienced Australian executives to run the operation and even conduct joint venture negotiations with Telstra (Beros, 2004, p.76).

Telstra has a vested interest in keeping other potential VOD out of the market for as long as it can. For example the ACCC mandated the unbundling of the local loop in mid 1999, but it took Telstra one year to meet this requirement, and then only after the regulator insisted on weekly progress reports (Enright 2000 in Beros, 2004 p.77). Indeed, until third parties get cheap access to the Telstra’s local loop and there is real competition in broadband, Australia will continue to pay high prices for broadband (see Ergas, 2004). The unbundling of the local loop reduces barriers to entry to third parties by lowering entry costs into the broadband market. The increased competition in the market and lower prices increase the level of demand for broadband services and provide more opportunities for the
delivery of interactive applications.

Alongside infrastructure, content is critically important to the users’ experience of broadband and interactive applications. Foxtel has had a near monopoly over the content market. If niche players are unable to access content on a commercially competitive basis, then players with bigger financial power such as Foxtel can get rid of them from the market on the basis of content. Arguably this has substantially slowed the deployment of iTV services.

Since the late 1990s there have been discussions about the possibility of requiring Telstra to divest its interest in Foxtel as a means of opening up access to its premium content. If Telstra was prohibited from entering the pay television business in 1995 the competitive environment of Australian telecommunications and television industries would be potentially different (see Kelso, 2008). Correspondingly, the consequences for interactive broadband services would have been profound.

The NBN project funded by the Federal Government in 2009 raises the opportunity to undo the mistakes made by previous governments that allowed Telstra to be vertically and horizontally integrated in telecommunication, pay TV and content markets, and to control both the copper network and its retail operations (see DBCDE, 2010). However the Federal Government’s decision to publicly fund the HSB network through NBN Co was linked with negotiations with Telstra to join the NBN. Actually the government required of Telstra to take its network infrastructure to reduce the cost of building the network and move its fixed-line customers to the new network for it to be viable (Kruger, 2010a). The same deal allowed Telstra’s telephone and broadband customers to migrate to fibre NBN. After complex negotiation in June 2010, Telstra signed a preliminary $11 billion deal with NBN Co (LeMay, 2010). Therefore, Telstra has had potential to be the largest player in the open access network which can contribute to a significantly more competitive telecommunication industry in Australia.

In general, without competitive regulatory policies regarding access to infrastructure and content, iTV will continue to be only an experimental venture or competitive advantage of only privileged providers. Open access to broadband infrastructure and content is a crucial factor for increased competition and the creation of business models which could be beneficial to providers and users of interactive services.

**Standards**

The crucial issue regarding all iTV platforms is the adoption of standards which would secure cost-effectiveness and assist efficiency of iTV applications. “No standard means no single market for STB vendors; No standard means no single, safe choice for the consumer” (Morton, 2003). All iTV players understand that adopting a single platform standard is the easiest way to make the industry cost-effective and deliver efficiencies and better experience for users. Yet, it is difficult for a small country such as Australia to set standards, hence, the role of the Australian government is limited. “[G]overnments are reluctant to mandate a standard, so there is pressure on the industry to co-operate in determining a single standard” (Budde, 2009, p. 3). Nevertheless, in 2006, there were two major TV standards on the Australian market: Open TV and MHP.

In general Foxtel and Austar accepted Liberty Media’s Open TV standard, which was adopted in the UK, and has had a strong connection with News Corporation (see Budde, 2009). The Open TV standard seemed to be the most successful and the cheapest proprietary standard which allows effective diversification in applications and revenues (see Morris
and Smith-Chaigneau, 2005). From the beginning, Optus chose the Liberate system which was developed by Optus’s then co-owner, Cable and Wireless (C&W). After Foxtel and Optus’s deal in 2002 Optus cancelled their contract with Liberate. Since Open TV offered to recover their costs they decided to follow the Open TV standard.

Australia, like the UK, has adopted the European digital video broadcasting (DVB) standard (rather than the US ATSC standard) which permits the delivery of wide-range content. In order to support interactive applications, DVB-T relies on the non-proprietary MHP middleware which Australian PSBs endorsed in 2001. Already mentioned, MHP is an application programming interface (API) for ensuring the compatibility between programs running on STBs that have different architectures. It is a non-proprietary system, meaning any broadcaster is able to use the technology without paying a licence fee (see e.g. Fötisch and Plösch, 2002; Smith et.al 2003).

The use of an open standard for interactive TV middleware means that receiver manufacturers can target multiple markets rather than developing products to the specification of a particular broadcaster. For example SBS, in partnership with Sun Microsystems, pioneered the first interactive applications using MHP for the ‘Dateline’ program. They had developed back-end systems that made additional information available for its news bulletins and an interface that allows viewers to send feedback. However a wider introduction of MHP in Australia proved a difficult process.

At one stage there was talk among broadcasters to move to the MHP platform. Yet, the technical characteristics of MHP and different industry interests caused a mixed approach of proprietary middleware vendors and pay TV providers. Despite the fact that both Foxtel and Optus had MHP migration strategies for their products, they are critical of MHP’s much higher hardware specifications than existing platforms. MHP works only on more expensive STBs with more memory and processing power than current models offer (see Fischetti, 2001; Hayes, 2001). Another drawback of MHP is large hardware which, in comparison with proprietary middleware systems, has a short life span (see MacKenzie, 2002).

In comparison with proprietary platforms such as OpenTV, MHP was not clearly created for TV in terms of its access sources and user input. For a developer with no prior experience, it is more difficult to learn and maintain due to a distinct lack of resources and lower quality of documentation and tools (Hutton, 2004). In addition it was less efficient at accessing video and audio. Moreover, MHP is a one way service which offers users a variety of ways to access information but no opportunity to communicate with broadcasters – no ‘back channel’.

In 2002 Channel Ten proposed one STB with dual receivers for pay TV and FTA. Foxtel strongly rejected the proposal because their OpenTV platform was already dominant on the international and domestic market. In general DTTV is being implemented in a horizontal market which is dominated by an open MHP platform and adopted by Australian PSBs and FTA. Quite the opposite, iTV is mainly implemented in a vertical market, where each pay TV operator has its own STB, middleware and applications and cannot run on another manufacturer’s STB. That is the reason why first roll-out of iTV came from the pay TV sector (see Barns, 2002). Foxtel as a major pay TV provider has exercised a monopoly on the market with its Open TV platform which potentially allowed additional revenue streams and at the same time it allowed cheaper STBs. In that way Foxtel economically blocked alternative platforms, supported by a government decision not to impose standards in the belief that the industry should collaborate (see Bryden-Brown, 2001).
Another drawback for MHP was that it was not available on STBs until 2006 due to licensing problems from owner Sun Microsystems. A delay meant that the spectrum granted by the Government was used only for digital broadcasts that could be seen by a few hundred people who spent $700 each for a STB. (MacKenzie, 2002) The implementation of MHP depended on mass production of digital STBs. Only in that case would providers invest in iTV content.

In the meantime, FTA providers such as the Seven and Nine networks were looking at alternatives for iTV application developments which are components to MHP and were able to migrate across different applications but did not have a proprietary migration path. An interim solution was DVB HTML, a component of MHP which Nine, for example, was using in 2001 to develop content “templates” and deliver interactive voting service (Lyons, 2001). The focus was on content that can be replicated, such as sport iTV, which can be applied to various programs. In comparison with the FTA providers who decided to implement some components of MHP before the arrival of MHP itself, SBS and ABC were involved in the Optus Liberate and Austar Open TV trials for the purpose of ‘testing the water’ and making sure they could manage interactive applications. For both of the trials most of their investments were in partnerships and the production of content, but not development of interactive applications per se which would require massive investments.

Regulatory restrictions, as well as technical obstacles of MHP standard, together with long awaited STBs, forced broadcasters to offer true interactive applications only as an experiment, and postponed the identification of business models for multimedia content. In contrast, the Internet has created participative platforms based on common open standards, simple protocols and easy navigation allowing users to have free access to interactive content. Internet open standards have encouraged the creation of fragmented sub-activities of production and distribution that individuals and collective actors often share without a clear specification of roles. This fluid movement among roles creates contingent configurations of what Bruns (2007) calls “produsage” where use is “the condition sine qua non for people to participate in content production” (Narduzzo and Odorici, 2007, p.15).

Costs

The intensification of globalization, deregulation of the broadcasting industry, and economic rationalism as a framework of television policy caused the broadcasters, especially PSBs, to face declining budgets. As a consequence, they faced reduced government financial support regarding capital investment in new technologies, causing the ABC for example to embrace “one of the most comprehensive outsourcing programs in its history and replace local content with cheaper overseas buy-ins reruns” (Millard, 1999, in Padovani and Tracey, 2003, p.67) and start discussions over alternative sources of revenue. Audience engagement and development of creative applications were the means through which PSBs aimed to secure commercially valuable high ratings which would justify tax payers money and government investments.

Finding the right balance between serving public interests and being commercially feasible is a difficult task which has often had political connotations. The Australian government, with its political measures regarding digital TV policies and funding, impacted indirectly on public broadcasters’ engagement with new technologies such as iTV. Securing finances through negotiation with the government became a major obstacle for better exploration of new media by PSBs, and also caused an inability to plan ahead for big projects in general.

With the arrival of the Howard Liberal government (1996-2007) PSBs had a particu-
larly difficult time. “The Howard coalition government’s refusal to grant any additional finance for digital production prompted the ABC’s 2003 cancellation of its two first digital channels, established in 2002 – FlyTV for young people aged 13–18 and Kids for those at primary school” (Jacka, 2006, p.173). In the UK, by comparison, “the government mandated that 20% of the BBC digital channel must be interactive, insisting that only compelling services will persuade users to switch to digital” (Einev, 2004, p.192). They supported the initial collaboration between the BBC and a number of pay TV providers hoping to kick start the interactive industry, with the aim that later on market and users would begin playing more significant roles in the deployment of services. In comparison with pay television, which was supported by their overseas co-owners aligned with, for example, Microsoft Corporation, the PSBs were silently discouraged from those investments, relying only on their experience and expertise.

In addition, the development of interactive applications involves expensive multidisciplinary software composition, an activity related to the employment of a skilled team of software engineers, applications developers and interface designers who are able to handle the technical complexity of interactivity. In comparison with, for example, Foxtel, which could afford to employ overseas staff, the PSBs could not afford to do the same.

In summary, iTV applications were seen by PSBs as a way to potentially increase ratings and provide additional access to Government finances. Producing original interactive content with limited technical, organizational and financial resources proved difficult for PSBs who have not been encouraged to compete with the commercial sector and prioritise profit over public broadcasting values. Therefore:

“iTV was just an experiment […] it is really just to educate the public on the potential of TV and also to really expand our research and development and really engage with the audience in that way” (PSB interviewee in Jakovljevic, 2010 p.62)

**The Challenge of the Internet**

A “technological push” created by the convergence of different technologies and devices led by the Internet initiated a resurgence of interests in iTV (see Jakovljevic, 2010). Technological reinforcement encouraged providers to be more innovative, flexible and pursue user demand. For many TV providers, online interactivity represented survival, the ‘life line’ which they needed to follow to continue to be part of the digital business. Therefore many media analysts predicted the ‘death of television’. For example Budde (2009) argues that television is an out-of-date medium because all the content is moving online in the hands of users who are becoming creators of content.

The Internet has provided all sorts of solutions once promised by iTV. It is a convenient tool allowing users to create their own interactive content, to “pull” content as they want it, instead of being “pushed” by television program choices and schedules without regard for the usefulness of them or appropriate time of viewing (see Pesce, 2006). Not surprisingly, users are not ready to pay for television content they can find for free on the Internet (see Jakovljevic, 2010, p.45). Yet less payment from users means fewer subscriptions which according to survey participants is a clear indicator of iTV failure.

In general the main advantage of the Internet over iTV is its participatory nature and ability to provide a wide range of content and services and providers. In contrast, iTV has been governed by the traditional economics of broadcasting which prioritises closed platform environments focusing on the content with the widest appeal, and providing only
marginal opportunities for users to participate (see Stewart, 1998).

Therefore there is a growing assumption that the Internet’s superior interactivity reduces the need for iTV. However, it may also argued that Internet: “1) taught consumers how to use graphical interfaces; 2) reminded viewers how much they like TV; and 3) showed marketers that advertising is relevant despite the decline of the mass audience” (McQuivey, 2008). According to McQuivey the Internet has not replaced iTV but rather brought a new dimension to it. The Internet brought a high level of interaction with TV content and proved to be a more effective source of revenue for broadcasters and advertisers.

With increasing penetration of HSB and policy reforms today, internet protocol television (IPTV) became an appealing service for broadcasters as well as telecomm and Internet service providers (ISPs) providers. “IPTV provides Pay TV-like quality and additional interactive services...the benefits of traditional broadcasting delivery and the Internet are both present in the provision of IPTV” (ACMA 2008, p.16). Ericsson IPTV and Hybrid TV are examples of providers today, who are finding their place on Australian market.

However in 2006 Australia was a country with relatively low average broadband download speeds and little real-time Australian content on the Internet (Tadayoni et al., 2007). The relatively low cost of Internet content production has not accumulated enough revenue for broadcasters and advertisers in comparison with television. Internet-only broadcasters were reaching a small audience.

Thus the Internet has meant opportunities but also more uncertainty for advertisers and TV providers. Turbulence in traditional revenue flow together with biased regulations has influenced less investment in local content and cheap imports from mostly the UK and U.S (Sinclair et.al 1996; Cunningham and Jacka, 1996). So while advertisers were increasing spending on Internet TV, they were still investing millions to broadcast networks because they delivered relatively predictable audience numbers (see Whaba, 2010).

For advertisers, television has been still a profitable business. The trends in Australian TV Advertising and usage showed that:

“The average Australian household spent between 3-5 hours watching TV...

Approximately 94% of Australians tuned in to the TV at least once a week...

Spending on TV advertising grows at the steady rate of 5-6% per year” (ROI, 2007).

In addition there was no standard way of measurement of audience engagement, which has been an ongoing source of concern for many companies wanting to advertise and for media buyers seeking to find the best places for their advertisements. In a small market such as Australia the broadband population was insufficient to draw the advertisers that the website's business model was built on. Traditional TV advertising still promised very high reach providing branding benefits, suiting big brand marketers with big budgets. It is still a powerful medium for impact and recall.

So there were no single format and advertising business model dominated. Instead, a combination of old and new business models, as well as interactive technologies and traditional techniques, were seen as the solution for iTV.
Neither broadcasting nor the Internet provided a sufficient source of revenue for broadcasters with minimal costs. It seems that it is too soon to declare the end of traditional TV media, or too early to declare wide proliferation of new advertising formats. Television has been in the state of flux, where advertisers and providers still searching for new means of reaching their audience, and create feasible new business models. The advent of interactive services such as VOD has meant that television will need to continue evolving in the landscape dominated by providers but also “produsers” whose collaboration and sharing content has potential in the long term revolutionize the TV industry.

**Conclusion**

The research showed significant tensions over iTV deployment between incumbent providers and new emerging models of broadcasting. The first wave of digital television (DTV) regulations has not supported competition and diversity of interactive content and services. Instead, the Federal Government decided to preserve the status quo and continue protecting commercial broadcasters. Restrictions on multichanneling and new players, constrained datacasting regulations and limited access to broadband technologies, in conjunction with concentrated media ownership, all acted to discourage successful commercialization of iTV. In addition iTV in Australia suffered drawbacks caused by a shortage of adequate STBs, lack of standardization in technology, high costs, lack of local content and, perhaps most significantly, the absence of collaboration between providers in establishing infrastructure and rules which would allow easier proliferation of services. Expensive hardware, limited trust in the usefulness of interactivity related to TV, the existence of competing interactive media, as well as failure of the government to widely promote DTV, all made audiences reluctant to pay for iTV services.

The wider exploration of iTV potential is determined by a number of conditions but mostly depends upon more competitive broadcasting policies which would promote diversity of services and providers, and more dynamic relationships between media practitioners. Such broadcasting policies would challenge the traditional status quo in Australian broadcasting and the ongoing privileges of commercial broadcasters which so far have not brought much creativity and innovation to the TV industry in general. With wider deployment of HSB and IPTV it will be interesting to see in the future what kind of compromises the industry and regulators are willing to make to accommodate newly merged models of broadcasting and create profitable revenue streams.

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Abstract: The international education sector is a major export earning industry for the Australian economy according to the Australian Government. It is also central to the nation’s international relations ambitions. However, Australia’s reputation as a safe and welcoming environment has been questioned following a series of highly publicised assaults against international students, particularly Indian nationals studying in Melbourne. This study analyses the effects of the Victoria Police public communications response in 2009 and 2010 to the assaults. In particular, did the Victoria Police Commissioner’s communication response to the assaults positively influence attitudes and perceptions within the Indian international student community and the media? The tools applied in this study originate within a range of traditions in risk communication theory including heuristic and systematic information processing methods, public relations including best practice and dialogic theory, critical discourse analysis, and media content analysis. This study demonstrates that police communications failed to positively influence perceptions and can be seen to have amplified negative perceptions due to a combination of messages and messaging methods that discount theories of risk perception and information processing.

Keywords: Indian, Students, Assaults, Police, Melbourne, Media

Contextualising International Education in Australia

The international education sector is a major export earning industry for the Australian economy and is central to the nation’s international relations ambitions. However, Australia’s reputation as a safe and welcoming environment was questioned following a series assaults against international students, particularly Indian nationals studying in Mel-
bourne in 2009-2010. The communication response by the Victorian Police to the assaults is the focus of this study. Applying primarily risk communication theory and critical discourse analysis as well as a frame analysis of media coverage, this study investigates the perceptions of the Victoria police communications to the assaults.

In the 2009-10 financial year, the Australian international education services sector generated $18.6 billion to the Australian economy. It is Australia’s largest export sector according to Australian Government data, easily surpassing personal travel services and professional and management consulting services. Statistics show that international student enrolments peaked in 2009 and 2010, with more than 620,000 foreign nationals enrolled in educational institutions across Australia. International students with Indian nationality were (and continue to be) a highly significant demographic within the sector constituting approximately one sixth of the total international student enrollment numbers in 2010, second only to Chinese nationals. Data shows that just over 100,000 international students from India were enrolled in Australian educational institutions in 2010. The State of Victoria was the destination of choice for most, with close to 46,000 enrolling there. This figure is more than double the number than for New South Wales. In total, close to 91,000 international students generated almost $6 billion in income in 2009-10 financial year for the State of Victoria. International students are also significant financial contributors to the institutions where they study (Australian Education International, 2010a, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). A 2009 Australian Senate enquiry into international student welfare stated that, “the average proportion of total revenue in higher education derived from overseas student fees is 15 per cent” (Education Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee, 2009, p. 11).

In addition to the sector’s contributions to earned export income, international education is also a strategic tool that supports Australia’s diplomatic ambitions and international relations. A speech given in 2009 by the Minister for Education, Employment, Workplace Relations and Social Inclusion and the current Australian Prime Minister, the Hon. Julia Gillard, drives home the tactical importance of the international education sector to the nation:

[I]nternational students do much more than contribute to our economy and create jobs...People coming to Australia to study and Australians studying abroad promote cross cultural experiences that benefit us both now and in the future, building understanding that underpins tolerance and stability here and abroad. The relationships formed by students support long-lasting diplomatic, research and business links...Many [students] have gone on to be leaders in their own countries and the contacts and relationships they forged as young students have proved of invaluable benefit to us (2009).

Recent student satisfaction surveys show that the majority of international students are satisfied with their study experiences in Australia (Australian Education International, 2010c; Evaluations Survey, 2010). Significantly, the majority of international students who graduate find employment in an area related to their field of study and at levels similar to their domestic Australian cohort (Australian Education International, 2010b). A study conducted by Victoria University on the issue of community safety for international students in Melbourne found that while the majority of international students say they felt safe, almost half believed that international students were not as safe as their Australian counterparts. “The odds of international students having this belief were 1.8 times greater than those for domestic students” (Babacan et al., 2010, p. 3).
In response to the publicity surrounding the assaults, Victoria Police issued media releases and spoke directly with journalists to address public concerns. Their comments were frequently quoted and referred to as part of the overall media coverage of the assaults. This paper argues that those communications and in particular the statement made by the then Victoria Police Commissioner was central to heightened perceptions of risk of assault as well as claims of racism made by the Indian and international student community. Theories central to risk communications and information processing are able to demonstrate how the Indian community perceived the assaults within the Australian context and how an international diplomatic crisis developed over a relatively short period of time. In addition, applying critical discourse analysis theory techniques to the Victoria Police Commissioners statement enables issues of power and agency to be addressed.

**Reviewing Risk Theory Traditions**

Theories of risk and the development of strategies to manage risk, including communication campaigns, tap into powerful traditions originating in distinct schools of thought and practice. Each approach offers different insights into a particular risk scenario and provides a set of tools that support a critical analysis of the management of a risk issue. Two concepts – systematic information processing and heuristics – stand out as potentially valuable tools for investigating the impact of the risk communication strategies employed by the Victoria Police in relation to the assaults against Indian students.

The systematic information processing approach is often viewed as ‘technico-scientific’. It relies on an evidence-based methodology where social phenomena are investigated using empirical and quantifiable practices. Data is gathered to expose probabilities and explain risk events. In this epistemology, the explanation is often delivered by an ‘expert’ and received by the non-expert general public (Slovic, 1987). For example, the assaults against Indian international students in Melbourne can be seen as a ‘hazard’ whereby people are being physically harmed by others. The assault can be analysed empirically using a systematic science-based approach. The scientific output from the analyses could then be used by experts, such as police officers, as part of a strategy to address the risk. However, risk theory informs the practitioner that the use of this strategy alone is not likely to meet with success. This is because social actors, such as students, are likely to interpret the ‘hazard’ quite differently to the expert. (See for example Fischhof, 1995; Plough & Krimsky, 1987; Slovic, 1987.) The way in which a hazard is perceived by individuals, groups, organisations and nations is dependent upon a range of complex variables that are not necessarily (or even often) associated with the technico-scientific approach (Slovic, 1987). For example, Singer and Endreyn note that individuals have a selective concern with danger: “Automobile driving, for example, often inspires relatively little concern, despite its risks, while air travel tends to drop dramatically after acts of airline terrorism” (cited in Freudenburg, Coleman, Gonzales, & Helgeland, 1996, p. 32).

Key factors that influence an individual’s attitude to risk can be interpreted within risk communication theory categories of: uncertainty, likelihood, newness, catastrophic potential, dread, voluntariness, controllability and trust (Gray & Ropeik, 2002). An individual’s attitudes and beliefs are shaped not only by reflecting on empirical evidence but also on pre-existing beliefs, values and experiences (Trumbo, 1999). These attitudes and beliefs are in turn shaped by forces such as historical or economic narratives (Tierney, 1999). Thus the construction of what it means to die in a car crash rather than a plane, or in the case of this paper, to be assaulted, can be seen as a product of a dynamic socio-cultural process whereby the symbolic meaning of ‘assault’ is situated within the cultural and social world (Tierney, 1999).
FROM HAZARD TO RISK TO DISASTER – THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CRISIS 2009-2010

Applying some of the tools available in risk communications theory to the Victoria Police communication activities which addressed the assaults against Indian students sheds light on the explosive way in which the hazard event – the assaults – grew in significance from an unpleasant but common social hazard to an international political disaster for the nation, as evidenced in newspaper articles and the Indian Ministry of External Affairs travel advisories (Das, 2009; Ministry of External Affairs India, 2010a, 2010c; Wilson & Callick, 2010). As early as January 2009, the Victoria Police and the Indian community were developing divergent views on the central issues of race and hatred, and the role they play in crimes against people in the Indian community (Victoria Police, 2009a). Assessing the interplay between the opposing beliefs and attitudes of the two groups – the Victoria Police and the Indian community – is central to understanding why the Victorian Police communication strategy appeared, at times, to create as much outrage in the media as the crimes themselves. This issue is further addressed in the media content analysis section of this paper.

The first significant communication activity to be played out in the public sphere occurred on 13 May 2009 when the Victoria Police issued a press statement with the headline: “Police concerned by rise of assaults on Indian students” (2009). Then, on 2 June 2009, the media release entitled, “Chief Commissioner discusses assaults on Indian students” (Overland, 2009) was produced. When used well, the media release is a potentially powerful mechanism for establishing a dialogue and building a relationship with a specific target demographic (Kent & Taylor, 2002). An analysis of the model used by the Victoria Police media releases shows that the organisation conforms to a unidirectional, sender-to-receiver, model of communication (Fischhof, 1995; Plough & Krimsky, 1987). In this model the Victoria Police and the Chief Commissioner position themselves as ‘experts’ who inform the non-expert ‘lay person’ of the ‘facts’. Per this model, they offer the ‘right’ answers that others, by implication, lack or have misinterpreted. A disjuncture in risk perception occurs when the receiver – the Indian community – does not interpret the ‘facts’ in the way the sender (the Victoria Police and the Chief Commissioner) intends (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Plough & Krimsky, 1987; Slovic, 1987). For example, in the first statement of 13 May 2009, the Victoria Police publicly defended their organisation against accusations that they were not “adequately responding to a rise in assaults and robberies on Indian students” (Victoria Police, 2009b).

Van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis provides a useful tool for analysing communications from a top-down perspective from within a defined sociopolitical relationship such as that generated by the Victoria police. According to van Dijk (1993), individuals, groups and institutions that have access to enact, legitimate or reproduce the dominant sociopolitical discourse of the elite are able to exercise social power over those who do not. The result is social inequality based on politics, culture, class, ethnicity, race or gender. This type of social inequality may be harder to identify when hidden within an accepted power relationship such as between “police officers and citizens” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 250). And that, “if immigrants, refugees and (other) minorities suffer from prejudice, discrimination and racism…such events will be called racist or sexist if knowledgeable blacks or women say so, despite white or male denials” (1993, p. 253). The denial by the Victoria Police in their 13 May media release of claims they were not responding ‘adequately’ to the assaults reproduces their socially dominant position. Their statement supports their claims to be the possessors of the ‘real knowledge’ about ‘response adequacy’, not the community, a belief reinforced by their legitimised power relationship. By contradicting the Indian community belief that the police were not responding adequately to the assaults, the Victoria Police statement can be seen to cast the Indian community ‘in error’, as less reliable and therefore
less trustworthy. The consequence of this type of communication does little to promote positive, trust-based relationships between the two groups (Kent & Taylor, 2002). In a second statement, published on 2 June 2009, Simon Overland, the most senior police officer in the state of Victoria, issued a first person media release to ‘discuss’ the assaults against Indian students. This statement was issued following a highly publicised and well attended street demonstration organised by the Indian community in Melbourne. The aim of the demonstration was to protest the assaults which the Indian community perceived as racist (Henderson, 2009). The intention of the Chief Commissioner’s media release was less clear, as Australian journalist Greg Sheridan writes:

Brumby and his Police Commissioner Simon Overland at first were inclined to deny the problem was racial at all. Eventually they came to admit that some attacks were racial, but still cling to the idiotic defence that most of the crimes are opportunistic, as if it’s impossible to be opportunistic and racist. In making these assertions, Brumby and co must be the only people who believe them. Certainly the victims of the crimes don’t. (2009).

As Slovic states, “the precise manner in which risks are expressed can have a major impact on perceptions and behaviour. For example, an action increasing one’s annual chances of death from 1 in 10,000 to 1.3 in 10,000 would probably be seen as much more risky if it were described as producing a 30% increase in annual mortality risk” (Slovic, Fischhoff, & Lichtenstein, 1982). In the 2 June media release the Chief Commissioner states that 1447 people of ‘Indian descent’ were assaulted in 2008-09 and that this figure is an increase over the previous year. Little additional context is offered by the author to manage the risk perception categories of dread and catastrophic potential. Using heuristic and systematic processing methods, the reader of the media release forms a judgment about the ‘meaning’ of the risk filtered through existing beliefs and attitudes (Alaszewski, 2005; Griffin, Neuwirth, Giese, & Dunwoody, 2002). The Indian community had already framed the crimes as racially motivated. The Victoria University scoping study found a notable discrepancy between the views of stakeholders interviewed (such as members of the Victoria Police) and international students. “The majority of stakeholders believed that most violence against international students was opportunistic rather than racist in motivation. In contrast [in] interviews with international students...racism was the cause most commonly identified” (Babakan, et al., 2010, p. 3). Thus, the messaging was ineffective as a positive persuasion mechanism. The police approach may have served instead to further entrench the disjuncture between the Victoria Police and international students rather than build trust between the two groups1. The Chief Commissioners statement goes on to call Indian students ‘soft targets’, with a caveat whereby the Chief Commissioner, while acknowledging the term may be offensive to some Indians, in the same sentence denies that the term is derogatory. The use of the term ‘soft target’ was criticised in the media both here and in India (Stewart, 2010; “UN panel slams Victorian govt, police over attacks on Indians,” 2010).

The damage to the relationship of trust between police and the community can be seen in the media coverage of the issue. In India, for example, the Chief Commissioner was portrayed as a member of the Ku Klux Klan hiding behind a Victoria Police badge saying, “We are yet to ascertain the nature of the crime.”

Newspaper headlines screamed messages of fear and loathing such as: “Indian Fury on Student Bashing – Delhi demands action by Australia” (Wade, Das, & Gregory, 2009), “Teen Gang Targets Student” (Healy, 2009) and “The Fear that Stalks Indian Footsteps”
(Stapleton, 2009). On 2 June 2009, Hindu nationalists in New Delhi burned an effigy of the then Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd MP to protest the perceived racist violence (Hodge & Karvelas, 2009). On 12 June, the Indian Central Government’s Ministry for External Affairs responded with a public advisory published on an official central government website outlining actions and behaviours for Indian students travelling to Australia. The acknowledgement of “realities on the ground” included references to personal safety (Ministry of External Affairs India, 2009). By early 2010, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs had issued no less than nine travel advisories regarding assaults against Indians in Australia (Ministry of External Affairs India, 2010b).

While this paper does not explore Indian public opinion directly, newspaper coverage in Australia shows an intense concentration by the Indian media on themes of race and national pride in relation to the assaults. For example, the article India Media Push Racism Theme (Pearlman, Smith, & Welch, 2010) examines the so called media ‘frenzy’ in India generated by the racist elements and denial of racism by the Victoria police in relation to the assaults and similarly with Indian Media in Overdrive on Racism (Wade, 2009). By the end of 2010, the international education sector was experiencing a drop in enrolments, a decline of 1.8%, compared to an annual growth rate since 2002 of 10.7% per year. Enrolments from India experienced the largest decline of 16.4% over the previous year (Australian Education International, 2011b). An analysis of media coverage during 2009 and 2010 using media frame analysis techniques such as used by Gamson and Modigliani (1989) is a valuable tool to make explicit perceptions in the Australian media of the issue of assaults in relation to the Victoria police commissioner’s statements.

**Public Discourse – media analysis**

Media frame analysis such as used by Gamson and Modigliani (1989) enables public discourses in the media to be identified and analysed. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) argue that media discourse is an essential part of “understanding the formation of public opinion” (p. 1). Their approach is to interpret and make explicit discourse narratives in the media in order to understand the relationship between media coverage and the public’s construction of meaning, that is the ‘frames’ of reference (mental models) applied when an individual considers an issue. They demonstrate how packages of information (elements of a discourse that are collected into meaningful clusters), have a natural advantage in the media if the
ideas and language resonate with larger cultural themes, that is, journalists show a preference for issues that display strong cultural resonances (pp. 5-8). A media content analysis on the issue of crimes against Indian international students is a useful tool to help uncover explicit and implicit attitudes and beliefs in public opinion.

To source media articles for analysis, the newspaper database, NewsBank, was queried using the search terms: Indian, students, violent and Melbourne for the Australian newspapers The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian. This search reveals that during 2009 and 2010 these newspapers published over 200 news and opinion pieces on the issue of crimes against Indian students. To refine this raw data for further analysis, all newspaper articles in the peak periods of May, June, July 2009 and January, February, March 2010 (see Table 1), were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet was then sorted by name of publication and reporter. Every fifth article was selected for closer examination and content analyses. This provided a stratified, randomised pool of 31 articles out of a potential 200 (Riffe, Lacy, Nagoya, & Burkum, 1996). Articles in the final sample were analysed using coding schemes recommended by social research academic, Alan Bryman (2008). His recommendations include accounting for key social actors in the coding scheme, which in the case of this paper are the Victoria Police, international students and crime motivation. The analysis uses the concept of “frames” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Frame definitions (see Attachment A) summarise the primary narratives used by reporters when writing on an issue. For example, the Victoria Police are generally framed against three narratives, in that they are either misunderstood by the general public, are in denial about racism or are actively racist. Frame definitions were created using a constructionist approach similar to that outlined by Gamson and Modigliani (1989). ‘Dispositions’ of positive, descriptive or negative (Bryman, 2008) capture the ‘tone’ or quality of ‘feeling’ expressed by the article in summary. An article might be ascribed a positive disposition where the reporter writes an article that is ‘upbeat’ and solution focused, such as the article written by John Brumby, the former Premier of Victoria, (Brumby, 2010). Alternatively, a negative disposition would be one that is highly critical and uses words and imagery to generate feelings of anger, sorrow and frustration (Sheridan, 2009). A descriptive disposition is one that uses neutral words and phrases to account for actions, for example, a leader might ‘address an issue’ rather than ‘face up’ to consequences (“How to play an Indian bouncer," 2010). (See the Coding Manual (Attachment A) for more definitions.)

**RESULTS OF MEDIA ANALYSIS**

An initial analysis shows that 68% of news story headlines evidenced an over-riding negative disposition (Bryman, 2008, p. 282) in that overall, the discourse appeared unfavourable and critical toward the issue, for example, “Indians passive by nature? Don't add insult to injury” (Rundle, 2009), and “Killing reveals another race problem” (O'Malley, 2010). In total, 66% of the body content also showed a negative disposition, even when the headlines were descriptive (neutral) in disposition. Fifty-one percent of the articles demonstrated a belief that the primary motives for the crimes were race and hate, while 35% stated that they were predominantly opportunistic with some possible small element of racism involved.

In terms of how international students were perceived, the emotional frame ‘innocent’ and more economic-focused frame ‘commodity’ were equally attributed, at 48% each. One article framed international students in terms of potential ‘threat’ to stable society, a very low number. Also the frame ‘immigration system rorter’ did not appear even though it was represented in the larger raw data sample for this time period. Even so, any articles that emphasise this aspect are not likely to have significant impact given the results for ‘inno-
cent’ and ‘commodity’.

Finally, the Victoria Police were perceived in the majority of the new articles, 45%, to be ‘in denial’ regarding the significance of race and hate as motivations for the crimes reported. 25 percent framed the Victoria Police response as ‘misunderstood’, in that they were perceived to be managing the issue well but that the (lay) general public was misinterpreting their motivations and actions. 16 percent suggested they were actively racist, while an equal amount did not reference the Victoria Police in any demonstrative way.

**Conclusion**

What clearly emerges from this study is that Victoria Police communications in 2009 and 2010 failed to positively change perceptions of risk and is instead likely to have amplified negative perceptions. This occurred due to a combination of messages and messaging

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<td><strong>Headline tone Disposition</strong></td>
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<td>68% Negative</td>
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methods that did not appear to consider key factors involved in the development of attitudes and judgements as they relate to perceptions of risk during a crisis. It also failed to positively address the socio-cultural construction of meaning from the perspective of the Indian community. The power imbalance inherent between a policing organisation and a minority community also acted to compound the growing disjuncture and distrust between the Victoria Police and the Indian community.

An analysis of a stratified random sampling of newspaper articles during the peak coverage periods showed that the majority of media reports also framed the crisis in negative terms. However, the failure of Victoria Police communications in this instance offers the opportunity for further study to consider different approaches when dealing with communities that exhibit strongly-held, culturally based beliefs. Policy makers and professional communicators should consider the issues raised in this paper and seek ways of addressing them using contemporary best practice communication and public relations practices. The apparent discrepancy between the reporting of high levels of feelings of safety by individual international students in student surveys, compared to high levels of fear reported at the group and societal level would be a potentially productive area for future research.

It is worth noting that there are structural issues that contribute to the crime-based ‘hazard’ of assault which has not been covered by this study. Future research could address these structural issues from a ‘best practice’ communications perspective that takes into account relevant risk theories.

ENDNOTES

1 Approaching this statement from the perspective of crime theory, it is relevant to note that ‘hard’ quantifiable data regarding race and hate motivation in crimes for Indian international students is not available. While the Victoria Police publicly state on several occasions that race and hate cannot be proven to be motivating factors for the crimes, they never publicly acknowledge that a lack of evidence can also be an indicator of a hate crime (Mason, 2010).

REFERENCES


APPENDIX I: CODING MANUAL

HEADLINE AND BODY DISPOSITION

Positive = that the overriding discourse (voice) in the article is mostly favourable

Descriptive = that the overriding discourse (voice) in the article is neither favourable nor critical but is describes without disposition

Negative = that the overriding discourse (voice) in the article is mostly unfavourable and critical

CRIME MOTIVATION FRAME

Opportunism = the overriding discourse is one where crimes are committed based on random chance
Race and Hate = the overriding discourse is where crimes are committed based on xenophobia

Mix race and opportunism = the overriding discourse is where crimes are committed based on a mix of random chance but propelled by xenophobia

STATUS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT FRAME

Innocent = discourse has an emotional quality in regard to 'innocence', may also imply naivety.

Immigration system rotor = motives for being in Australia are suspect

Commodity = discourse objectifies students, clustering them into depersonalised, non-emotional articles of trade eg to serve political or economic narratives

Threat = to Australian social cohesion

VICTORIA POLICE FRAME

Actively racist = the discourse implies that Victoria Police are participants in discrimination based on race and ethnicity

Misunderstood = Victoria Police are doing a good job but their motives and beliefs are misinterpreted

In denial = the Victoria Police are in denial about race issues in modern society
CRITICAL MEDIA STUDIES IN TIMES OF COMMUNICATIVE CAPITALISM: AN INTERVIEW WITH JODI DEAN

SEBASTIAN KUBITSCHKO, GOLDSMITHS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

INTRODUCTION

Jodi Dean draws from a wide field of interests, ranging from political theory, post-structuralism and psychoanalysis to neoliberalism, cultural studies and feminist theory. But her work is, above all, interested in contemporary space and the possibility of politics (Dean, 1996; 1997; 2002; 2006; Passavant & Dean 2004). Her most recent research and writings focus especially on the correlation between digital media and such political environments and opportunities (Dean, 2009; 2010a; Dean, Anderson & Lovink, 2006). Arguing in clear and outspoken prose, or what might also be called a provocative and even ‘radical’ perspective, her publications have gained worldwide attention. Not for no reason she has recently been described as ‘a rising star’ (Dean 2010b).

Instead of highlighting communitarian effects of digital media, Dean deconstructs common accounts of the public sphere and points towards the drastic shortcomings of the internet and its digital tools as mass culture (Dean, 2003; 2009). This skepticism towards the emancipatory and democratising effects of mediated communication emerges already in her time as a PhD candidate under the supervision of Jean Cohen at Columbia University; and more specifically, during her stay as a visiting PhD researcher at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany in the 1990s. Critically reflecting on the institute’s leading figures at that time, Dean cultivates a line of thought that stands in stark contradiction to the reasoning put forward by Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth.

Perpetually advancing and updating her argument to the scenarios of informational societies, Dean sees everyday communicative exchanges enabled through media resources as not only undermining capacities for democracy, but also entrapping people in a specific mode of domination. In particular the expansion and intensification of communication and entertainment networks yields not democracy, but something else entirely: communicative capitalism (Dean, 2009; 2010). Instead of leading to more equitable distributions of wealth and influence or enabling the emergence of a richer variety in modes of living and practices of freedom, the deluge of screens and spectacles undermines political opportunity and efficacy for most of the world’s people (Dean & Passavant, 2004).

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Jodi Dean is currently Professor of Political Science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, a liberal arts college in Geneva, New York. She runs a blog and is currently finishing a manuscript entitled The Communist Horizon for Verso (forthcoming 2012). In this interview, conducted before her keynote at the Taking Control conference at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, Dean talks about the value of critical theory for media studies, the decline of symbolic efficiency and the necessity of a (global) revolution to bring about change.

**PLATFORM:** In your latest book Blog Theory, you say that, ‘critical media theory is possible when it occupies the trap of its emergence, not when it offers happy solutions ... A media theory that is critical has to forswear the affective enterprise of contributing the feeling-impulses of hope and reassurance and offer thinking instead’ (Dean, 2010, p. 32). And indeed, the theory you put forward is much more on the ‘critical’ than the ‘happy’ side. Put bluntly, you are indicating that contemporary communications media capture their users in intensive and extensive networks of enjoyment, production, and surveillance. Your term for this formation is ‘communicative capitalism’. Could you please remind us what you mean by communicative capitalism?

**Jodi Dean:** Communicative capitalism is the merger of democratic ideals and capitalism. A basic way to think about this is: What is the Habermasian ideal of communication? It is inclusion, discussion, reciprocity, and everyone getting a chance to speak for as long as they want. That’s the internet – one of the key instruments of the spread and consolidation of global neoliberalism. It is one of the primary ways that capitalism operates today in that capitalism has subsumed globally (almost) everyone through networks of communication. Inclusion, as in getting connected into the communication networks that serve contemporary capitalism, is championed as necessary, vital, crucial. Communication networks are supposed to let more and more people and firms find markets and be more competitive. And at the same time, they are supposed to enhance participation and thus democracy. The merger of the two is treated as natural, something it wouldn’t even make sense to question. So if you think about where we are now as a stage of capitalism where communication is the dominant mode, the exact same processes and practices that are democratic in fact are the ones that configure capitalism.

**PLATFORM:** It is through this notion of communicative capitalism that you evolve the concept of the ‘decline of symbolic efficiency’ – a concept rooted in thoughts of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Slavoj Žižek. The idea that symbols increasingly lose their power to transmit significance from one person to another and from one setting to another, however, seems to contradict contemporary tendencies like the increasing ‘emotionalisation’ through symbols in politics and media. Glenn Beck, for example, putting Barack Obama next to Mao and a swastika. Or if we look back to Iran in 2009, perhaps the single greatest impact of the internet on the Green Movement was the YouTube video that documented the death of Neda Agha-Sultan. Does your notion of symbolic inefficiency perhaps more specifically argue for a decline of ‘left’ symbolic efficiency?

**JD:** I think we have to unpack this question. The first thing I want to say is that Glenn Beck does not use symbols but uses images and affects. He doesn’t open up a space where a symbol is possible for discussion or re-signification. Instead it is: here is Hitler, here is Obama and this feels ‘ucky’. But these alignments are not functioning as symbols rather they are bits of emotion. My god, most Americans don’t even know the difference between fascism and communism. That is why I think that Glenn Beck does not counter my thesis of the decline of symbolic efficiency.
With any of the Middle East revolutions it is a huge mistake to reduce them to their new media practice. I think this is a bizarre kind of colonising, to try to make them like the ideal of communicative democracy that is so much valued in the United States and in Europe and to not recognize the actual material and physical struggles, the labour movements, the organized people on the street as really what are the mobilising forces.

**PLATFORM: Why, then, focus on ‘symbolic’ instead of ‘material efficiency’?**

**JD:** The way I think about it is that the decline of symbolic efficiency helps us to understand how it is the case – as Agamben and Hardt and Negri have pointed out – that we have communication without communicability. That is, in the flow of affects and impressions, communicative utterances are reduced to contributions. They are flattened out so that any contribution is equal to any other. As a contribution to contemporary information networks, a photograph of a cute kitten is communicatively equivalent to news of a natural disaster or a report on particular instances of governmental corruption. This entails, then, a kind of loss for political action insofar as it is extraordinarily difficult to install a gap in the overall communicative flow, to act in a way that breaks with rather than reinforces the dominance of communicative capitalism.

I would agree that we have to focus on the material domain, and the material aspects of the movements. But, I don’t view communication as immaterial – how could it be immaterial? First of all, there are actual, embodied people communicating … well, sometimes, other times there are just annoying robocalls or computer bots, but these, two, are material, reliant on silicon chips and machines and fibre optic cables and so on and so forth.

The mistake I am trying to diagnose is the one that reduces politics to democracy and that thereby reduces politics to getting messages out and communicating rather than viewing politics as the ‘struggling’ on the ground. And I don’t think that is just a problem of the left, though the left has been very enthusiastic about new media. I think it is a more general problem and it is one that makes political organising very difficult in the US and Europe for anything other than capital – and things appear to be easy on that side.

**PLATFORM: It has become almost common sense to argue that once we acknowledge the multiplicity of the sites of politics, and of democracy, we must also acknowledge the multiplicity of the subjects and forms of politics and democracy. You half-jokingly refer to this move as ‘adding an s’ (Dean 2003: 96), because you think it does not entail a serious re-conceptualisation of anything much. But is it not essential, as Noortje Marres (2005) has highlighted, to recognise that it is not self-evident which subjects are to be taken into account as part of democratic processes, or which forms of democracy are to be enacted?**

**JD:** I am not so worried about democracy. We must stop voicing and expressing the need for radical egalitarian redistribution and elimination of capitalism as if this were democracy or as if this kind of political ambition could be subsumed under the heading democracy. When people talk about the multiplicity of subjects these days that is like consumer goods. That is, every position is the same as every other, everything has got to be included in some kind of a big tank. That is a consumer approach to viewpoints in that it assumes that the existence of view requires acknowledgement or inclusion or even validation of that view. I mean, why would anyone want to make sure to include racist subjects or misogynist subjects? Rather, we must say that these viewpoints are wrong and regressive and they are not the ones that are going to be useful for an egalitarian people struggle.

Anything else is just adding an ‘s’, as if infinite pluralisation were a political choice
rather than either a statement of ontology – things are in becoming – or a statement of capital’s own tempt to proliferate goods and sites. But it is not a politics.

I am currently working on a book with the preliminarily title The Communist Horizon that is mainly concerned with organisational questions and issues. Organization is crucial for a movement to have duration and not get folded back or subsumed into claims like ‘we need awareness’, ‘we need inclusion’, ‘we need access’ or reduced to a kind of libertarian emphasis on each individual’s free choices.

I should add here that I completely disagree with these new lines in political theory influenced by Bruno Latour. They emphasize the agency of objects, the way things have impacts that cannot be reduced to human intentionality. Well of course this is in part true – but it’s obvious. Computers fail constantly. The objects in my bookbag are constantly pressing the buttons on my Blackberry, calling people and letting them listen in on my conversations. But it’s important to remember that humans cannot be reduced to intentionality either; this is the basic lesson of psychoanalysis – the unconscious, the desires and drives that make us who we are even as they forever elude us. And, isn’t it interesting that at a time when political agency is in crisis, when the dominant thematic is one of post-politics and post-democracy, that rather than attempting to cut through the predominance of things, this Latour-inspired political theory joins up with them, investing them with human’s missing agency? A friend of mine (from Goldsmiths, actually) has said that this preoccupation with things is just another form of commodity fetishism. I think he’s right, but only up to a point – it’s also ontology fetishism.

**PLATFORM:** Alain Touraine argues that, ‘If you believe in the implacable domination of economic forces, you cannot believe in the possibility of social movements’ (Touraine, 2001, p. 3). Although you acknowledge that any transformative politics today will have to grapple with digital media, your view that we all reside in what you call a ‘media trap’ (Dean, 2010) appears to be all-inclusive. Is there a way out of this trap?

**JD:** What does that quote even mean? Who would claim the ‘implacable domination of economic forces’? Certainly not Marx! Economic domination is coextensive with class struggle – it’s hardly ‘implacable’. Anyway, on the media trap. It’s tricky. You are right to say that the way I’ve been talking about it may be too close to ‘implacable’. I have been thinking about this apparently inescapable trap in a few different ways. In Blog Theory I mention two. One way is to recognize that the system can’t keep going and it will get to points of collapse and destruction; this way is intrinsic to capitalism. So there’s the natural inevitability of crises. It’s not a great political point but it is one of the ways that the system breaks down. And, there is something to it insofar as it tells ‘the left’ that we have to be organized, ready, united so as to be able to deal with crises when they arise. The tragedy of the 2008 economic crisis is that there was no organized alternative response. In the US, this absence has been filled by the reprehensible Tea Party which is making major strides towards destroying the few remaining achievements of the twentieth century.

Another way the system breaks down is when people actively make it break down. And this, again, can happen in different ways. We have, for example, seen the revolutions in the Middle East. It is really exciting seeing people forcing a change. Less visible forms of this are hackers. Hackers broke into the French finance ministry in December 2010 and the Pentagon early this year and that is pretty impressive as well. I think these are just some possible sites of change.

My discussion of communicative capitalism does not require that we the subjects are all idiots and deceived. It is rather our practices that are the problem, not what we know. It
is not that we become subjects who do not have a clue. It is that we are subjects who in all our different efforts end up in reproducing the system. So the question has got to be, how to find ways not to reproduce the system. And I think when you break it down it does not reproduce and when there are deliberate acts like hacking it might not reproduce either.

**PLATFORM:** Yet, applying your notion of communicative capitalism to the upheaval in North African nations, one might argue: they managed to establish change but now they simply are in a similar situation that people in democracies around the globe are.

**JD:** They are not in the same situation because it is harder for us to argue against a ‘tyrant’. We simply are not under that kind of dictatorship. Overthrowing dictators and tyranny is a completely different question than: What does it mean to overthrow a democracy? There are examples in history of right-wing overthrows of democracy. But for a left-oriented collective, that is harder. And it is risky and uncertain. I believe it is communism or barbarism. The barbarism is getting worse in the US, the UK and most of Europe because of the rampant inequality and the finance sector’s increasing hold that is not sustainable. The question is: How do we respond as our societies are declining? Do we seize the reigns and make them go some place else or do we scrap for the little pieces?

**PLATFORM:** In a recent talk at the Goldsmiths and Sage symposium on the future of democracy, you said that change can only be brought about by a global ‘we’ and not by local activities that focus, for example, on modes of consumption. How do you think would it be possible to create a global ‘we space’, and would such space only be possible on a global scale?

**JD:** Ultimately it - the abolition of capitalism - is only possible on a global scale. If we think about global communications, we already have a global scale. We also have a global transport and a global finance system. And the alter-globalization movement did important work in building networks of activists all over the world. So the interconnections are already there. Further, if we think in terms of the idea of the ‘common’ (as in the important work of Hardt and Negri, Cesare Casarino and others coming out of the Italian context) we already recognize that we as a ‘global we’ are making and producing things together. And, of course, localism makes no sense; it seems to idealize some kind of agrarian ideal where small groups make what they need to survive? I mean, really, is that the only alternative to capitalism? Hardly, we already know that collective ventures can be organized on a global scale.

Anyway, how is the global revolution possible? Maybe we should ask: how is it not possible? The fascinating thing about the recent mid-east revolutions has been the contagious effects and the way they’ve made contemporary problems and inequalities visible as global. But it’s going to take organising and duration. I think a good step involves more imagining, lots of leaps of imagination and thought experiments that say: how do we do it; how do we think that something like this can be possible? Training ourselves to re-imagine it and then training ourselves to think through the steps and then implementing them. This is necessary to enact an organisational model that lets people realise that there are new ways of organising the possible. This sounds speculative, and it is speculative but imagining those steps is a move towards exercising them.

We can take the recent protests and occupations against the rise of tuition fees and cuts in the public sector in the UK as an example. People start thinking: how do we want to reorganise not only the university but England; how do we want to reorganise not just England but the EU; and how do we see this in a global context? At each step, the ‘we’ changes
and grows – and of course encounters new difficulties and oppositions, which compel choices and decisions that strengthen the emergent organization. As long as neo-liberalism is our dominant economic model all the education pursuits in the world are meaningless. The neoliberal economy doesn’t need a middle class and that’s why, for example, education is cut. But how long will people continue their quality of life decline? How long will they go on and let states cut more and more services?

**PLATFORM:** Given the fact that media (technologies) become increasingly omnipresent what is the future of critical media studies? If the object disappears in the daily realm of normality, other fields (e.g. sociology, political economy etc.) might be better places to start looking at media.

**JD:** If we think in terms of academic fields, the often-made distinctions are artificial, because it makes no sense, for example, to talk of political science without sociology, but yet they are still separate fields. And it makes no sense to have sociology without anthropology as well. So all these disciplinary boundaries blur if we think of academic fields as starting points for questions rather than as forms of expert knowledge with some kind of complete and all-encompassing jurisdiction over particular questions.

A lot of media studies unfortunately ends up being either pointless content analysis, training for people to become media manipulators, or generic counting and measuring. Critical media studies, in contrast, is explicitly political, and is explicitly concerned with how communications are used in ways that change people’s subjectivity, in ways that change our life chances, and finally, with how we can change them. So the future of media studies is in the critical and this critical direction will and must reject arbitrary disciplinary distinctions. In fact, to say anything important at all, media studies has to make explicit the role of media in maintaining capitalism.

**REFERENCES**

ANZCA Section
INERTIA AND TURBULENCE: TELEVISION AND INNOVATION IN NEW ZEALAND’S DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION ECOLOGY

Anna Jackson, University of Auckland / University of Melbourne

Abstract: Internationally, documentary content has been a key area of innovation and experimentation for public broadcasters and public funding bodies as television moves beyond broadcast and into online and multiplatform environments. This has not been the case in New Zealand where the production of an online or convergent television documentary has had little or no support from either the primary funding body (NZ On Air) or any broadcaster. This paper examines the factors that have slowed the adoption of new platforms and technologies in television documentary in New Zealand from a critical political economy perspective, with an emphasis on the unique conditions that have shaped New Zealand’s documentary production ecology. Through analysis of opportunities for innovation and barriers to participation in an emergent global new media ecology, this paper argues that a continued lack of investment in public service media significantly inhibits the development and wellbeing of New Zealand’s documentary production ecology.

Keywords: New Zealand documentary, New Zealand television, multiplatform documentary, public service media, media production ecology, critical political economy, critical production studies.

Introduction

This paper examines how the specific conditions of New Zealand’s television industry have shaped New Zealand’s documentary production ecology from a critical political economy perspective, identifying declining public service values and cultural policy limitations as barriers to the adoption of new platforms and the emergence of documentary forms and practices. In this discussion I argue that a reconfigured notion of public media and a shift of priorities in cultural policy is necessary in order to support the development of contemporary documentary practices within a “new media ecology”.

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This paper is derived from research (in progress) towards a joint PhD at The University of Melbourne and The University of Auckland which examines New Zealand’s documentary production ecology as a unique case study of a cultural and creative industry in transition. It draws on interviews, observation, analysis of production trends and my own involvement as a participant in the production ecology to assess how significant changes within New Zealand’s documentary production ecology (such as the decline of public service broadcasting and the emergence of new media platforms and technologies) affect the function(s) of documentary as a creative and cultural industry.

Ecology offers a useful model for the examination of the complex dynamics within a cultural system. Common variants of the term ‘ecology’ in the context of media studies and creative and cultural industries discourse are ‘creative ecology’ (John Howkins, 2009), ‘media ecology’ or ‘production ecology’ (Simon Cottle 2004; Jeanette Steemers 2010). As in Bourdieu’s concept of a “cultural field” (1993) this approach presents industry relations, practices and texts as, “complex, ambivalent and contested” (David Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 4). Media outputs are examined in relation to “the broader field of production including institutional and competitive relationships, dependencies, key players, and professional practices” (Steemers, 2010, p.39).

While New Zealand’s documentary production ecology is affected by global media shifts, such as the introduction of new media technologies and platforms, it is also shaped by unique local conditions, such as a highly deregulated and intensely competitive market-driven broadcasting environment. The discussion that follows aims to examine how and why New Zealand’s documentary production ecology has so far failed to participate in an expansion of documentary practices spurred by new media platforms and technologies that also serve to explore models for public media beyond existing broadcasting models. After outlining the factors that have shaped New Zealand’s television industry (and by extension the production ecology of documentary in New Zealand), I analyse characteristics of television documentary in New Zealand reflective of a cultural policy framework that supports ‘localness’ and ‘universality’ (Dunleavy and Joyce, 2011), but fails to promote critical social debate or analysis or (central to this discussion) innovation. Finally, I examine some of the pathways towards content production for new platforms that have been explored in New Zealand, identify key barriers to innovation and argue for a revision of existing cultural policy frameworks.

**DOCUMENTARY IN THE GLOBAL NEW MEDIA ECOLOGY**

New technologies and media platforms necessitate new production and distribution models, new ways of engaging and interacting with audiences and have radically expanded the field of documentary, introducing new and hybrid forms such as the web documentary, multiplatform documentary and transmedia documentary. Documentary is no longer confined to the screens of cinema and television but can increasingly be found on our desktops, on our mobile devices, and in our public places, our museums, galleries, libraries, and streets. It is increasingly social, viral, locative, multi-modal, participatory and evolving. New technologies and media platforms have also had an impact on the production and distribution of linear documentary forms such as theatrical and television documentary, as producers, broadcasters and distributors are increasingly compelled to utilise web and social media to promote, distribute or even finance documentaries.

The adoption of new platforms and the emergence of new forms of documentary signify a redefining of public media in new public domains described by Patricia Zimmerman as a “new media ecology” that is:
layered, multiplatformed, swiftly changing, and reconfiguring audience and outreach [...] altering the relationships between production, distribution and exhibition with long tail marketing, niche markets, blurrrings between professional and amateur, new economic models, and new emerging sectors of public media. (Zimmerman, p.287, 2008)

While the dynamics of this new media ecology challenge “old media” oppositions between independent and commercial (for profit) media (p.287), public media institutions such as Australia’s ABC and Screen Australia, the UK’s BBC, Canada’s NFB and France’s CNC have played a critical role in fostering innovation and supporting the emergence of new documentary practices. This has not been the case in New Zealand, where unique factors have created a public service media vacuum, inhibiting the expansion of documentary into new public domains as seen in territories where public media has a stronger foundation. There is no question that television, and public service broadcasting in particular, is going through a transitional period of significant change in New Zealand. However, rather than the expansion of established notions of public service media and the adoption of new platforms and technologies, change has meant a movement away from public service media. This is evident in the divestment of public service obligations for New Zealand’s state owned broadcaster TVNZ; the withdrawal of free to air non-commercial television (TVNZ 6 and 7); and the movement of some services to pay TV (Heartland and Kidszone).

**New Zealand television documentary in context**

The history of New Zealand television (the most productive area of New Zealand documentary production) is characterised by change and uncertainty, and the present era is no exception. A combination of both global and local factors has created unique conditions underlying the current period of fluctuation without innovation; a state of inertia in the midst of turbulence.

Global economic, cultural and technological trends are manifested locally according to New Zealand’s specific conditions. Because of its small size, geographic isolation and unique cultural mix, New Zealand’s screen production ecology is fragile and subject to frequent upheaval. According to Roger Horrocks:

New Zealand television is a small and vulnerable habitat with a number of endangered species. Broadcasters and production companies struggle to survive and grow in a challenging environment, sensitive to any new form of life introduced (such as pay television) or any change of temperature (such as a downturn in advertising revenue). A key aspect of ecology is the awareness that everything is interrelated so that any change has subtle flow-on effects. (Horrocks, 2004a)

Horrocks points to the near-fatal impact of the coming of sound on New Zealand’s film industry in the 1920’s, which was “too fragile to carry the increased costs or to get around the legal problems associated with patents”, as a tangible example of the production ecology’s vulnerability to external forces of change (Horrocks, 2004b).

At the present time there are a number of different factors in the global media environment that have significant implications for New Zealand’s documentary production ecology. Globalisation has brought about the relaxation and deregulation of media ownership restrictions and the easing of global trade tariffs and the emergence of networked commu-
nifications. Digital television broadcast has brought about a proliferation of free to air TV channels in addition to cable or satellite subscription services. New platforms have emerged such as mobile and web content delivery, video on demand and IPTV, creating an increased demand for content, access to niche markets, and opportunities for self-distribution. The introduction of cheaper, more accessible production equipment, such as HD prosumer cameras and desktop editing software, has created a lower barrier to entry and increased competition amongst independent documentary makers, amplifying tensions between ‘amateurs’ and ‘professionals’ within an industry where ‘creative labour’ is already precarious. Audiences are increasingly accessing and interacting with online and mobile content and engaging with social media. Content is increasingly pull rather than push, delivered on demand rather than on schedule, facilitating the Long Tail business model (Anderson, 2006), and the rise of crowdfunding and self-distribution. New technologies and new platforms also mean an increase in content that is hybrid, multimodal, multiplatform, participatory, user-generated, interactive and locative.

These shifts represent significant changes in media production, consumption and distribution (or use), providing new opportunities for the creation of new kinds of content on a variety of platforms and the ability to reach wider audiences/markets on a global scale. Yet the ‘new media ecology’ is also a highly competitive environment creating new challenges for local producers. For the New Zealand documentary production ecology the impact of these global forces is highly dependent on specific local conditions.

As previously stated, New Zealand television has a history of frequent and often dramatic change. Briefly summarised, in the early days of television in New Zealand in the 1960s the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation (NZBC) established a documentary department which, like the BBC on which it was moulded, produced documentaries emulating the Grierson model (Goldson, 2004). By the 1970s independent filmmakers emerged seeking to challenge the conservatism and dominance of in-house producers. The neo-liberal economic reforms of the mid-1980s saw a dramatic shift from “a highly protectionist economic structure based on tariffs, subsidies and a large public service” to “an extreme monetarist regime, one that stressed individualism, competition and commercialisation” (Goldson, 2004, p. 243). This resulted in the commercialisation of the public broadcaster (TVNZ), which became a State Owned Enterprise in 1988, and the launch of the first privately owned television channel, TV3 in 1989. In this period TVNZ’s in-house documentary production unit was closed, completing the transition to a fully independent and highly competitive television documentary production industry.

Public television in New Zealand has always occupied a negotiated position between cultural policy and economic imperatives, striving to meet public service objectives and justify government subsidy within a competitive market environment. The Broadcasting Commission, New Zealand on Air (NZ On Air), was an innovation intended to ensure the provision of a public broadcasting service in an environment where the state owned broadcaster is required to perform commercially in a competitive market, by opening up public funds for local content to all broadcasters and producers on a contestable basis. While the introduction of competition in New Zealand television and establishment of NZ On Air led to a boom in the production of local content it also created great tension in the production ecology between funders, broadcasters and producers. In order to receive funding from NZ On Air for a documentary, a producer must have approval from a broadcaster commissioner. This means that although NZ On Air has “a mandate to support various priorities within broadcasting – in summary ‘local content, coverage, Māori culture, children, and minority programmes’” (Horrocks 1996, p. 54 in Goldson, 2004, p. 244), programs must also have the potential to attract good ratings. So while documentary is largely dependent on cultural
subsidy and nominally expected to fulfil a public service function, it is ultimately required to be cost-effective and highly commercial.

The instability of New Zealand’s television broadcasting environment is a significant factor inhibiting the innovation and change required for a shift to a multiplatform digital environment. TVNZ’s dual commercial and public service mandate has always been highly problematic and at each election it becomes a political football. Throughout the 1990’s TVNZ was treated as an asset to be groomed for sale. Labour’s election in 1999 promised to bring about a renewed commitment to public service broadcasting, reflected in the introduction of the 2003 TVNZ Charter, a policy reform that was well-intentioned but largely ineffective, conflicting with both TVNZ’s and NZ On Air’s respective institutional objectives (Thompson, 2011a).

The election of a new National government in 2008 brought about the end of the TVNZ Charter and a return to the commercial agenda of the 1990s. In 2009 the Charter funds were reallocated to NZ On Air as a contestable fund for “high quality public broadcast content of wide appeal” (NZ On Air, 2009a). 2011 saw the passing of the TVNZ Amendment Bill, officially repealing the Charter and divesting TVNZ of its public service obligations. The commercial-free TVNZ digital channels on Freeview TVNZ6 and TVNZ7, established by the previous Labour government, once looked like promising contenders for the position of a reinvented public service media provider for the digital multiplatform age. However, in March 2011 the family-oriented TVNZ6 was replaced by a commercial youth channel and its children’s content was shifted to pay TV (TVNZ Kidzone24 on SKY) (TVNZ, 2011). In April 2011 the Government announced that funding for TVNZ7, which has supported a great deal of factual public service content, would not continue beyond June 2012 (TVNZc, 2011).

While public interest in documentary is strong (NZ On Air, 2010a) and free to air broadcasters continue to screen New Zealand documentaries,1 a fully contestable public funding model without a dedicated public broadcaster is unlikely to support innovation, such as the development of multiplatform documentary content. According to Peter Thompson’s analysis:

funding arrangements need to take account of the position of a channel in the wider media ecology; in some instances, private commercial media might provide more public value per dollar than a public channel. However, this is certainly not a justification for making all funding competitive and open to all operators. Contestable public funding among a small group of similar commercial operators will still tend to overproduce genres/formats with proven audience appeal that minimise their opportunity cost. To ensure competition for quality and diversity, a plurality of institutional models needs to be present in the media ecology. In other words, optimising public value per public dollar requires an environment were there are not-for-profit operators which can accept content with high public value but high opportunity costs that would normally deter commercial operators. (Thompson, 2011b)

‘TENDENCIES’ IN NEW ZEALAND TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY

Two competing “documentary tendencies” in New Zealand television identified by Annie Goldson (2004), the ‘fast turnaround’ and ‘quality series,’ continue to dominate the
television documentary landscape in New Zealand in the form of the popular factual entertainment series (‘fast turnaround’) and Platinum Fund documentaries (‘quality’).

The $NZ15 million Platinum Fund was established in 2009 with funds previously allocated to TVNZ for the provision of public service content under the TVNZ Charter (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2011). The fund aims to support “quality content which may be currently difficult to find on our screens or which may require a high level of public investment to get made” (NZ On Air, 2010b). Documentaries that meet Platinum Fund criteria are “long-form appealing documentaries on subjects of cultural, historical or artistic importance” and “research-driven short documentary series on issues or topics important to New Zealand” (NZ On Air, 2010c). The emphasis on quality equates with fundamental public service values with an aim to “inform, educate and entertain a good cross-section of New Zealand” (NZ On Air, 2011).

The Platinum Fund, which also supports quality drama and current affairs series, now plays a vital role in ensuring that some content with cultural as well as commercial value remains on New Zealand screens. However, a brief analysis of the documentaries supported by the fund suggests that Platinum Fund documentaries, rather than promoting innovation, support the well-established function of documentary as national project. As Mary Debrett has argued (2004), while New Zealand On Air’s funding policies have succeeded in building up New Zealand documentary as a popular genre and boosting documentary as an industry, this success is largely superficial and has come at a cost. Debrett describes documentary as the most cost-effective way to produce a higher volume of local content, achieving the seemingly positive outcome of promoting both national identity and local industry. Building on an argument developed by Avril Bell, Debrett cautions that rather than performing the social function of providing a public forum of critical analysis and debate and the exploration of alternative points of view, New Zealand documentary has become a vehicle for New Zealand identity as a national brand, a process which, “constitutes a stage in the commodification of documentary, and the corporate take-over of public space” (Debrett, 2004, p. 10).

Claims that New Zealand’s branded strands won an audience for documentary and helped build a ‘documentary industry’ invoke the inherent ‘worthiness’ of the documentary idea, yet simultaneously undermine it by asserting tabloid values and glib celebratory nationalism. Whether or not publicly subsidized programming can deliver public service goals in a broadcast marketplace depends on the accommodation of priorities other than revenue and ratings. Continued subsidy for social documentary as a discrete genre is a key element in preserving television programme diversity, for as documentary’s past truth and reality claims become untenable, only social purpose remains to differentiate the genre from the ragbag of factual programming. (Debrett, 2004, p. 20)

A brief analysis of the funding decisions for the first two years of Platinum Fund investment in documentary content (2009–2011) would seem to support this view. The 2009–2010 round of Platinum Fund investment was heavily weighted towards historical New Zealand subjects, summarised as follows: Docudramas were a major focus, with the fund supporting three historical docudramas, all centred on significant New Zealanders. Even the three drama programs funded were based on true stories: (Bliss, the story of New Zealand writer Katherine Mansfield’s early years; Tangiwai, the story of the Tangiwai train
disaster and Stolen, a telefeature based on the true story of a New Zealand kidnapping case). A 1 ½ hour arts documentary, Canvassing the Treaty and five part documentary series on New Zealand rivers, Rivers with Craig Potton, were also funded in this round (NZ On Air, 2009b).

The 2010–2011 Platinum Fund has an almost identical (though extended) blend of docudrama, drama ‘based on a true story’ and natural history documentary consisting of: Two historical docudramas (What Really Happened? Waitangi and Journey into Darkness); three dramas based on ‘true stories’ (Billy; Rage; and the series Underbelly NZ); two documentary series (Descent From Disaster, “Descendants of the people involved take us through major NZ historical events”, a six by one hour documentary series; and The Story, “Four leading documentary makers provide insights into important NZ institutions”, four long-form documentaries); and three natural history documentaries (The Hunt for the Pink and White Terraces, a one hour program; Primeval New Zealand – Where Wild Meets Weird, a one hour program; and Wild Coasts, five by one hour documentary series) (NZ On Air, 2010b).

There is no doubt that these documentaries play an important role in providing New Zealand audiences with quality television content, telling well-crafted New Zealand stories made by some of the country’s most experienced and talented documentary makers. However, there is still a gap to be filled here, with room for social documentary and innovation. Of the four functions of documentary identified by John Corner (2002), the Platinum Fund addresses aspects of three: Documentary as “The Project of Democratic Civics” (p. 6), “Documentary as Journalistic Inquiry and Exposition” (p. 6) and “Documentary as Diverson”. What remains to be developed is “Documentary as Radical Interrogation and Alternative Perspective” (p. 6).

If New Zealand’s ‘top shelf’ Platinum Fund documentary programs bear the ‘New Zealand Inc.’ brand as a mark of quality, many of the popular factual entertainment series funded by NZ On Air under the category of documentary have a generic flavour. These series eschew specific New Zealand stories in favour of universal subjects and themes that can be on-sold internationally as either cheap content or as a ‘format’, a pre-packaged concept with demonstrated commercial appeal able to be replicated (with the infusion of local flavour) in other markets. Examples of locally devised formats marketed and sold internationally are What’s Really In Our Food?, a consumer-focused show about “what’s in the food we eat” (Top Shelf Productions Ltd, 2008, 2009, 2010); Beyond the Darklands, an “insightful professional analysis of the lives of some of New Zealand’s most notorious criminals” (Screentime Ltd, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010); Missing Pieces, “the personal journeys of people who are searching for someone for a very special reason” (Eyeworks New Zealand Ltd, 2008, 2009, 2010); and Money Man, a program in which a financial trainer teaches Kiwis to manage their money (Cream Media Ltd, 2006, 2007, 2008). Two of these factual series (Beyond the Darklands and What’s Really In Our Food) have actually delivered sales income to NZ on Air (which takes a 25% return on net sales of programs where its investment is $200,000 or more) (Murray, 2010).

The commercial and popular success of New Zealand factual entertainment formats could be seen as an indicator of the growing maturity of documentary production in New Zealand as a creative industry capable of delivering transnational content to the global market. However, NZ on Air’s role in ongoing investment in such content highlights the complex mix of priorities faced by funders in what John Corner (2004) refers to as the ‘post-documentary’ age. For NZ On Air, ratings “provide a measure of value for public money” (Murray, 2010, p. 5) and support its objectives of reaching a sizeable audience where “programmes are valued by their target audience”(NZ On Air, 2011). The popularity
of Popular Factual series therefore could be seen to justify recurrent investment from TVNZ. However, questions could be raised about the fine line between ongoing support for content widely seen and enjoyed by the public, and the subsidising of content that delivers high ratings and therefore commercial success for the broadcaster, therefore potentially displacing the funding of more innovative and commercially ‘risky’ forms of content (such as multiplatform documentary production). A recent review of NZ On Air’s recurrent funding of TV series defends the practice of recurrent funding for high-rating content in a way that suggests that, particularly in the recessionary climate, the documentary industry cannot succeed without public subsidy (or in NZ on Air’s terminology, ‘investment’). The report points to a weakness in the funding framework that effectively compels NZ On Air to favour certainty over risk:

Popular Factual documentary series were consistently the highest rating genre of those recurrently funded, with almost all series far exceeding the ratings targets. With all genres, broadcasters have largely paid lower licence fees for these series in recent years, a factor that when combined with the demonstrated commercial success of these programmes could support an argument for lower public subsidies in the genre. One outcome of lowered public subsidies however is likely to be that despite receiving high rating for primetime local programmes, broadcasters would probably look to acquire more international product at a lower cost than locally commissioned programmes. The challenge for NZ on Air is to find a balance between the levels of public subsidy for series that prove to be commercially successful, while retaining (and growing) broadcasters’ support for locally commissioned programmes. (Murray, 2010, p. 5)

Economists and cultural policy analysts Hasan Bakhshi and David Throsby (2010) contend that digital platforms and production technologies have the potential to expand creative and economic opportunities:

> We stress innovation along four dimensions: audience reach; artform development; value creation, and business models. A cross-cutting theme is technological change. Digital technologies in particular raise the possibility that arts and cultural organisations can overcome the traditional constraints imposed by physical location, thereby expanding [...] audience reach” and to open “new avenues for developing the artform, create new sources of economic and cultural value, and spur new business models. (p. 4)

If, as Bakshi and Throsby argue, new digital platforms and technologies can facilitate the development and expansion of arts, culture and commerce as never before, New Zealand documentary producers will have the opportunity to bypass some of the limitations of local funding, production and distribution models, to reach new audiences, explore new forms and allow for the delivery of more cost-effective and targeted public service media. Arguably the commercial success of New Zealand popular factual television formats demonstrates the commercial potential of new forms of transnational content. However, given that multiplatform content production is emerging as a complex art form that requires new models for production and distribution, and while many New Zealand documentary producers may have world-class expertise in fast-turnaround television, few, if
any, have skills and experience in multiplatform/transmedia production. This would be a significant issue if there were a global (or even local) market for convergent documentary formats. So far, however, while it is clear that the ‘new media ecology’ is in a state of transition, the business model for post-television documentary is unclear, even in the territories where new forms of documentary are most actively supported by both public and private screen institutions.

A recent study by Canada’s Documentary Network, ‘Documentary and New Digital Platforms; an ecosystem in transition’ presents “a snapshot of the reaction, production and distribution of documentaries in a rapidly-changing digital environment” (p. 2). The study finds that new platforms are not detrimental to the television documentary ecology. On the contrary, it finds the number of hours viewers spend watching television increases every year, as does their interest in documentaries and that “online distribution platforms and broadcaster portals serve as audience-multipliers [increasing] the influence of documentar-ies” (p. 2).

These findings may seem a promising endorsement for the future of emergent forms of documentary and a good rationale for television broadcasters to embrace new platforms, but there’s a significant catch:

Today this new form of distribution does not automatically generate significant economic returns. For the most part, the platforms that disseminate documentaries on the Internet are not profitable. New ways of managing rights need to be found which can boost the public profile of works, and can also be a real source of revenue for the creators and producers. (Observatoire du Documentaire | Documentary Network, p. 2)

In a media environment as deregulated and commercially competitive as New Zealand, the uncertainty of the potential for new media platforms to offer a return on investment is largely unsupportable in the absence of a public service broadcaster or public funding body truly mandated to risk ventures in new media spaces. It is remarkable then, that some (albeit tentative) steps have been taken towards new forms of content production. The final section of this paper examines some of the pathways towards content production for new platforms that have been explored in New Zealand, identifies key barriers and limitations and suggests some broad measures that need to be taken to open up opportunities for innovation and expansion within both New Zealand’s television production ecology generally, and documentary production, more specifically.

MULTIPLATFORM AND BEYOND: FIRST STEPS (AND MISSTEPS) TOWARDS INNOVATION

Internationally, the investment in multiplatform content by public media institutions is not just the shoudering of the public burden of risk that the commercial broadcaster is unable to carry but a recognition that, in what Mary Debrett (2009) describes as ‘the multi-platform era,’ a single platform can no longer adequately serve the needs of a diverse and dispersed public:

In the social context of the digital era, when media services and the media habits of the fragmented audience are so diverse, access is no longer about scarcity, and universality needs to be addressed across the full range of media platforms in order to aggregate sufficient fragments to reach a general public. The flexible access of on-demand media offers a reinvented form of
universality, one that caters for contemporary lifestyles. It can also be argued that, by distributing re-versioned content, such services extend the shelf-life and reach of publicly funded productions, building on word-of-mouth publicity, and thereby help to maximize the value of public investment. (Debrett, 2009, p. 810)

Australia’s Public Broadcaster, the ABC, with the assistance of the Australian Film Commission, now Screen Australia, first launched the Documentary Online Initiative in 2001 “to encourage exciting and adventurous projects that exploit the possibilities of the Internet and challenge conventional documentary forms” (Screen Australia, 2001). Today, the ABC continues to have a clear multiplatform commissioning strategy in place for documentary. As the ABC’s commissioning guidelines indicate, multiplatform content entails more than video clips online, it requires a multifaceted approach to storytelling and interactive engagement across all platforms used:

TV Documentaries is actively seeking television ideas for all of the above genres that can translate onto other platforms across the ABC – ABC Online, mobile and gaming.

We encourage you to think of ideas that can run in parallel (rather than competition) with the programme itself, and give audiences the chance to experience and engage more fully in your idea and subject. “DVD extras” material is already accommodated by current web-support for programmes (e.g. Gallipoli Submarine, Australia: Land of Parrots) therefore these bigger multiplatform projects need a more ambitious sense of scale and level of interactivity. We are also looking for content where the online experience becomes intrinsic to the program i.e. a necessary part of content creation. (ABC Television, 2011)

NZ On Air took its first cautious steps towards the exploration of ‘digital content’ beyond television broadcast in December 2007 with the establishment of The Digital Content Partnership Fund. The fund, which provided up to one million dollars in contestable funding per year over a four-year period, has been experimental in the sense that few guidelines or restrictions have been given to applicants:

To encourage the widest range of innovative proposals NZ On Air is not limiting ideas to a particular target audience or genre. We are seeking genuinely original online audio/visual content that can attract and engage new audiences in significant numbers, preferably on more than one platform. The content must reflect and develop New Zealand identity and culture, and a clear understanding of and focus on a particular audience is key.

While leaving the style and target audience of projects open NZ On Air is likely to favour those projects that augment our current work in the television, radio and NZ music areas. Archival, Sports or News related projects are not a priority for this fund. (NZ on Air, 2010)

The contrast between these two requests for proposals is revealing, not only in terms of general differences between the two television production ecologies (for a start, Australia
is large and robust enough to support such an RFP for documentary alone), but more significantly, in terms of the different strategic approaches to new media platforms and technologies. The Australian RFP is specific in its call for multiplatform projects that run in parallel with program designed for television broadcast; potential platforms are specifically identified; and expectations in terms of scope, interactivity and user experience are stated. In contrast, the New Zealand RFP is open, articulating only one specific criterion. The only ‘must’ in a RFP that uses terms and phrases such as ‘not limiting’, ‘open’, ‘preferable’ and ‘likely’ is; “The content must reflect and develop New Zealand identity and culture, and a clear understanding of and focus on a particular audience is key” (NZ on Air, 2010). Even in the context of an initiative designed to promote innovation, NZ On Air is constrained by the cultural policy imperative to promote New Zealand identity above all values while at the same time securing an audience reach that qualifies its investment.

At this point I must acknowledge my own involvement, to various degrees, in three unrelated submissions made to The Digital Content Partnership Fund over a two-year period, two of which were documentary projects, none of which were successful. Lest my criticism of the Fund be attributed to a case of ‘sour grapes’ I would like to take pains to point out that during the fund’s four-year existence no documentary projects have been funded (surprising considering the role that documentary content has played in spearheading multiplatform production in other territories such as Australia). I would also argue that my experience in submitting to the fund has provided me with a unique insight into the efficacy of the fund from a content producer’s perspective in addition to that of a critical observer. My conclusion (subjective as it may be) is that the fund was hampered from the outset, lacking specific strategic objectives, providing little direction for content producers and showing little evidence of being informed by research into models for online and multiplatform public media employed elsewhere. As one submitter states in feedback cited in NZ On Air’s own (overwhelmingly positive) review of the fund at the conclusion of its four-year term:

Overall the New Media Fund [sic] has been a frustration to those who work in the area. It has basically been unobtainable. It has been geared towards old media practitioners and it seems most of the awards have been to the old school. In general the fund system works too slowly and is too unwieldy... [for smaller scale projects]. (Richard Naylor, cited on p. 9, NZ On Air, 2012)

Critically, the absence of specific objectives also meant there were no clear measures for success. While (in my opinion) many of the projects were disappointingy lacking in innovation, the fund has supported a few outstanding projects, the most notable of which is Reservoir Hill (KHF Media, 2009, 2010), a multiplatform teen drama series which won a Digital Emmy and is an excellent example of highly immersive and interactive multiplatform storytelling (using mobile as well as television broadcast and online platforms and incorporating social media and participatory elements).

Another initiative that could have had positive benefits for New Zealand documentary producers, TVNZ7’s educational multiplatform initiative, Learning Hub, was also doomed from the outset. Regrettably, Learning Hub was launched on the same day that Broadcasting Minister Jonathan Coleman confirmed that funding for TVNZ7 will not continue beyond June 2012 (TVNZc, 2011). TVNZ 7 Learning Hub offers textbook 21st century public media content; online educational material that extends broadcast content and offers viewers an opportunity to explore topics in greater depth and to engage with interactive educational resources (similar, though on a more modest scale, to the services provided by
BBC Learning in the UK). As Debrett (2009) has argued, such multiplatform services extend the shelf life of broadcast content and expand its uses (and arguably its wider marketability).

Not all initiatives towards developing a ‘post-broadcast’ media environment have also originated from within public institutions. The first online/web documentary project of any significance that I have identified in New Zealand does not come from an established documentary producer, has no association with a New Zealand TV broadcaster and received no public funding. Down to the Wire (http://downtothewire.co.nz/) is an online project conceived and produced by Wellington-based digital agency, Heyday (Heyday, 2010). The project is not overtly labelled as documentary, but in subject matter, form and content it is consistent with web documentaries such as those commissioned by ABC Online. Appropriately, the project tells a story of innovation, presenting the story of New Zealand’s Internet. The project uniquely utilises the properties of the web as a medium, using text, videos, an interactive timeline and music. It evolved over time, used social networks extensively and provided opportunities for users to contribute. It has even adapted some of the documentary conventions of the most popular New Zealand TV documentary formats, such as the use of a high profile personality (actress Madeline Sami) as series narrator. Where broadcasters and NZ On Air take the position that multiplatform content constitutes unjustifiable risk, here is a business that has invested its own resources in the development of an online documentary project as a demonstration of its capabilities, and as a means of demonstrating not only technical and creative capability but the potential of new forms of media communication to engage and connect with the audience/user. Down to the Wire shows that innovation can be seen not as commercial risk but as commercial investment.

Another independent initiative, the first of its kind in New Zealand, is Doc Lab, a three-day intensive cross-media incubator designed to encourage filmmakers currently working on projects to actively develop a cross-media/multiplatform approach. Doc Lab was established in 2010 by Documentary Edge, an organisation run by The Documentary New Zealand Trust (a non-profit organisation promoting documentary filmmaking and advocating opportunities for New Zealand documentary filmmakers). Multiplatform production intrinsically requires a collaborative approach, as the skill set required to work across multiple platforms encompasses a tremendous depth and breadth of technical and creative knowledge. It is an approach to production that necessitates a fluency in the languages of TV, web, mobile and gaming whilst still maintaining the focus on content and not platform. This is not a task for a single individual, but a collaborative effort to be made by a team, pooling resources and skills. Doc Lab aims to provide content producers from ‘old media’ backgrounds with a greater insight into new production methods and increased awareness of new media technologies and platforms.

Doc Lab was facilitated in 2010 and 2011 by Wendy Levy, then Director of the Producers Institute for New Media Technologies at the Bay Area Video Coalition in San Francisco (BAVC). Teams of filmmakers workshop projects with the assistance of both local and international mentors with a range of expertise in the development of multiplatform content. Having participated in the Lab in 2010 as part of a filmmaking team, and in 2011 as a mentor and participant/observer, I have been able to see how the Lab functions both to expand filmmakers’ understanding of working with new media technologies and platforms and to develop a multiplatform or transmedia approach to storytelling.

While the aims of the Lab are commendable and content is excellent, this program does have its weaknesses and limitations, the most significant of which is that the Lab works in isolation, unconnected to a broader public funding program and unsupported by a
broadcaster or alternative distribution platform. As the projects developed do not fit with existing public funding criteria or public media policies and lack commercial viability, the Lab is a theoretical exercise, though one generally applied to existing projects that the producers have a genuine (and often heartfelt) investment in. Consequently, my observation of Doc Lab has been that while some filmmakers have drawn some inspiration from the experience, perhaps applying their energies to the production of a complementary website that they may or may not have otherwise invested in developing, on the whole Doc Lab projects have failed to get off the ground and many participants seemed to express disillusionment with the limited opportunities for actual production.

**MOVING FORWARD**

Several roadblocks to innovation are identified in a 2008 report, Research into New Zealand’s Independent Documentary Sector, commissioned by the New Zealand Film Commission and Creative New Zealand to understand the “barriers and opportunities” faced by documentary makers, and to enable these agencies to reassess their current programs and determine their future roles in relation to New Zealand documentary production. The report was a response to an increasing number of proposals from established documentary filmmakers to the Screen Production Innovation Fund, a fund intended to “provide grants to emerging and experimental moving-image makers for innovative and experimental moving-image productions”, which were not innovative or experimental but more suited to mainstream/commercial television (Creative New Zealand and the New Zealand Film Commission, 2008). The report found that documentary makers were critical of funding and commissioning models as well as with the television environment. They felt that the documentaries produced were too homogenous and commercial, and constrained by the parameters of what constituted a ‘New Zealand story’. They also identified that experienced filmmakers were undervalued and underutilised, while inexperienced filmmakers lacked opportunities for development, with various factors making it very difficult for even experienced and well-regarded filmmakers to survive in the industry as documentary makers.

The report also highlights what is a critical challenge for New Zealand’s documentary production ecology; recognising a “growing need to meet multi-platform delivery requirements, including online possibilities” but emphasising that, “the potential for new revenue streams is still uncertain” (p. 15). Ironically, since this report was published, opportunities for the funding of innovative and experimental documentary works have diminished even further. The Screen Production Innovation Fund was replaced with the Independent Filmmakers Fund in 2009 (the "Creative New Zealand Independent Filmmakers Fund") and in early 2010 the New Zealand Film Commission withdrew from the fund. The 2010 funding round was continued by CNZ but disestablished in the latter part of 2010. Since the disestablishment of this fund only three documentary grants have been made by Creative New Zealand; $29,710 to Shirley Horrocks towards a documentary on Michael Parekowhai’s Venice Biennale 2011 (Creative New Zealand, 2011, 04 March); $6,000 to Peter Takapuna towards post-production costs of a documentary on waka (Creative New Zealand, 2011, 28 October); and $6000 to The Documentary Edge Trust for the 2012 Doc Lab (Creative New Zealand, 2011, 03 February). As of April 2012 no decision has been made regarding the future of NZ On Air’s Digital Content Partnership Fund and The New Zealand Film Commission mainly makes small investments in post-production funding for theatrical documentaries. The current funding climate therefore provides very little support for any kind of non-commercial documentary, let alone works for new platforms or other forms of innovation.

Although audiences increasingly engage in time-shifting and screen-shifting prac-
tices that disrupt the one to many flow of television, broadcasting will continue to dominate our media ecology for some time. However, the increasing role of new platforms in our media consumption should be recognised as we re-evaluate current funding, production and distribution models. A critical first step would be to re-examine outdated funding models that continue to privilege national identity politics and ratings-driven measures of success and give more weighting to the value of innovation. This is no easy task, one that demands new approaches to not only the allocation but also the sourcing of funds, as the Observatoire du Documentaire | Documentary Network report finds:

Documentary creation on the new platforms should be able to develop with appropriate resources without straining budgets allocated to linear documentaries produced for theatre and television release which should continue to develop. It is essential to find new sources of money. One way of increasing resources would be to involve the Internet service providers. As for the funds currently intended to finance the multiplatform productions and dedicated to experimental creation and innovation, a portion of these envelopes could be reserved for documentary on the new platforms in order to encourage its development. The granting of specific funds could allow these digital works to exist independently or in complement of linear documentaries created for television. (p. 2, February 3rd, 2011)

These turbulent times for public service broadcasting in New Zealand should stimulate action rather than inertia. If the broadcasting landscape is to be reshaped yet again, it is time to broaden and challenge existing definitions of content and distribution, to think Public Service Media not Public Service Broadcast; to consider cultural as well as economic value and to consider the role that all stakeholders (including Pay TV and Internet Service Providers) might play in contributing to the development of New Zealand’s media ecology.

ENDNOTES

1 It should be noted that the Māori Television Service (MTS) supports a significant number of quality New Zealand documentaries, but that MTS receives funding from the Māori Broadcasting Funding Agency, Te Māngai Pāho, in addition to screening programmes funded with the assistance of NZ on Air. While MTS has a specific mandate to support the Māori language and culture in New Zealand, it serves as an excellent model for a successful New Zealand public service media provider.

2 See also Jane Roscoe’s study of the series ‘An Immigrant Nation’ for an excellent in-depth study of New Zealand documentary and national identity (Roscoe, 1999).

3 See http://www.abc.net.au/tv/documentaries/online/ for an archive of ABC Online Documentaries.

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BEYOND THE BLOG: THE NETWORKED SELF OF TRAVEL BLOGGERS ON TWITTER

DEEPTI RUTH AZARIAH, CURTIN UNIVERSITY, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Abstract: Studies of the use of social media in tourism rarely discuss various tools in conjunction with each other. The growth of Twitter has attracted the attention of tourism researchers interested in the platform as a marketing tool and a source of information about consumers (Claster, Cooper, & Sallis, 2010; Hay, 2010). Similar studies of travel blogs largely focus on what tourists say about destinations and their own experiences (Akehurst, 2009; Bosangit, McCabe, & Hibbert, 2009; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). Blogs in general, and travel blogs in particular, are widely regarded as providing credible information about their authors. Both the content and formal features of these online narratives shape the self-presentation and positioning of their authors as bloggers. Given that blogs are increasingly “distributed” (Helmond, 2010) and that independent travel bloggers often link to other platforms, it is necessary to consider author-created content beyond the blog to understand the presentation of what Papacharissi (2010) calls a “networked self”. Drawing on the theories of Bakhtin and Goffman, which have informed previous analyses of blogs, and Dann’s (1996) concept of tourist discourse, this paper argues that the Twitter pages of independent travel bloggers extend the self-presentation in their blogs. In particular, it focuses on how travel bloggers use specific conventions, formal features, and narrative techniques of Twitter to express a networked self and reiterate themes of the blog. Through a random selection and textual analysis of various messages it finds that while there is some mention of the travel experience, the various conventions and conversations on Twitter are self-presentational elements that generally strengthen the authors’ position as travel bloggers. The characteristic narrative techniques of Twitter also reveal tensions between the discourses of travel and tourism. The networked self of the independent travel blogger is negotiated in these discursive tensions.

Keywords: microblogging, blogging, travel, self-presentation, discourse

Although tourism researchers view travel blogs as a rich resource on consumer behaviour and discuss their potential as marketing tools, such studies generally examine blogs hosted on travel-specific advertising-sponsored websites such as TravelPod and TravelBlog and focus on the content in entries alone (Akehurst, 2009; Bosangit, McCabe, & Hibbert, 2009; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). However, it is increasingly recognized that blogs have
a “distributed nature” (Helmond, 2010, p.7), often linking to content created by their authors on other social media platforms. Also, the self-presentation that takes place in blogs is dispersed across various social media (Helmond, 2010; Nabeth, 2009; Reed, 2005). This phenomenon is often seen in travel blogs hosted on independent websites that link to social networking sites, bookmarking tools, and microblogging services. Any analysis of how these authors present themselves as travel bloggers and describe their narratives as travel blogs must, therefore, move beyond the borders of the blog and take into account content created using other social media. This paper discusses how this takes place on Twitter, a microblogging service used by many independent travel bloggers.

The presentation of a networked self (boyd & Heer, 2006; Papacharissi, 2010) is a concept useful for interpreting how authors extend the positions and themes expressed in their blog to platforms such as Twitter. An individual mainly articulates the networked self by connecting to other people online (Baym, 2010; Papacharissi, 2010). Describing self-presentation on social networking sites as implicit rather than explicit, Zizi Papacharissi has observed that “individuals use the tools at hand to present themselves in ‘show not tell’ mode by pointing and connecting to individuals, groups, or points of reference” (2010, p. 141). This implies that there are two dimensions to the networked self. Not only is it situated in a network of social media surrounding the blog (technological), but also displayed via networking between individuals (social).

Taken in the context of microblogging, the networked self of the independent travel blogger on a platform such as Twitter is expressed in the connections made with other individuals via that platform. A second point to note here is that a presentation of the networked self ultimately involves “tools at hand”, suggesting that formal elements and technical features of online platforms can be self-presentational elements. Technical features of online platforms shape this self-presentation to some extent (Merchant, 2006). For example, web page authors may manipulate page design, fonts, and other visual elements to create a certain impression of themselves online (Walker, 2004). In fact, an individual’s presentation of self in any given social situation is strongly linked to the technology he or she uses at the time so that “the staging of the interaction, the mediation of the interaction and its performance depend crucially on the detailed material and technological arrangements in place” (Pinch, 2010, p. 414). While this seems deterministic, it does imply that each formal feature of a blogger’s Twitter page is instrumental in the presentation of at least some aspects of the self as travel blogger.

The microblogging platform Twitter’s central feature is a short post called a ‘tweet’ published on the Web via a computer or a mobile client (Java, Song, Finin, & Tseng, 2007; Oulasvirta, Lehtonen, Kurvinen, & Raento, 2010). Oulasvirta et al observed that these posts are self-presentational in nature because

> these messages function in two directions: (1) through creation of the sender’s persona in the eyes of others similar to Goffman’s notion of self-presentation...or at least keeping him or her “alive” as a poster who is interesting enough to be followed, and, secondly, (2) via the deepening interest followers find in his or her life (2010, p. 248).

This explanation is significant to this study for two reasons. First, it implies that individuals may use Twitter posts to ‘create’ themselves as authors of independent travel blogs. Secondly, by posting or ‘tweeting’ frequently, an author who uses Twitter to re-present his positions occupied in the travel blog can keep this impression of the self as travel blogger
‘alive’ for readers. In order to understand how authors achieve this using Twitter, it becomes necessary to examine how conventions and techniques such as “retweeting” a message, using the ‘#’ or hashtags, and the ‘@’ or at signs to start a conversation, ultimately figure in the presentation of self as a travel blogger or in the distribution of the content of the travel blog.

Analysing online self-presentation from a Bakhtinian perspective, Nelson and Hull (2008) observe that individuals use multiple discourses to reflect who they are, always keeping audience expectations in mind. The resulting narrative is heteroglossic and characterised by discursive tensions. Typically in online language, writes Nancy Baym (2010), “we blend and incorporate styles from conversations and writing with stylistic and formal elements of film, television, music videos, and photography, and other genres and practices” (p. 66). The idea that authors freely combine “familiar but out-of-place genres” to express themselves in a new online medium has also been discussed in Killoran’s study of self-presentation in homepages (72). It can be argued along similar lines that travel bloggers may creatively combine multiple discursive forms and language associated with various contexts in their tweets. This paper considers, in particular, how the discourses of travel and tourism figure in this self-presentation.

The traveller/tourist dichotomy that informs many debates in tourist studies (Franklin & Crang, 2001; Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005) often reflects in the various narrative styles of travel-related communication. For example, the personal tone of travel writing emphasises the adventurous, independent, or solitary nature of the travel experience. This involves what Graham Dann (1999, p. 159) describes as “writing out the tourist” to create a sense of solitude, focusing on the journey rather than the destination, describing a detachment from fellow travellers but a connection with total strangers, a focus on the self, and a tendency to describe experiences as being timeless, or as if they are happening in the present. For many authors, travel writing is the “presentation of multiple personas” and involves a constant switching between different narrative roles such as that of an adventurer or a clown (Holland & Huggan, 1998). The traveller role in particular is frequently used in travel-related narratives. Television travel hosts have played both travellers and tourists to describe destinations (Dunn, 2005). Those who describe their journeys use narrative techniques and themes – such as highlighting the dangers and difficulties faced – to present themselves as travellers and be seen as more authentic and adventurous than tourists (Noy, 2004; O’Reilly, 2005). Similarly, Richards and Wilson (2004) find that not being a tourist is a predominant theme in discussions between backpackers. They note that the impression of the individual as a traveller generally arises from toning down references to iconic destinations whilst highlighting “unique experiences off the beaten track” and identifying with values such as adventurousness, spontaneity, and heroism, as expressed by writers like Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac, and Bruce Chatwin (Richards & Wilson, 2004, p. 60-61). What emerges from studies such as this last, and as noted by other researchers, is a sense that much travel writing is gendered, masculine, privileging a male gaze, centred around the white European male, and that being perceived as a traveller is preferable to being seen as a tourist (Galani-Moutafi, 2000; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000).

By contrast, the discursive style of tourism advertising or brochures has commercial associations and is distinguished by its lack of sender identification, its impersonal and monologic style, euphoric language, and tautology (G. M. S. Dann, 1996). Dann’s framework is useful for identifying the specific narrative techniques and discursive forms of travel and tourism present in tweets. Travel, with its connotations of adventure and independence, forms a contrast to tourism, which is often seen as passive and superficial (Fussell, 1980). Where travel is fluid, spontaneous and unfettered to itineraries, an organizing
principle of tourism is that a certain number of sites must be consumed within a particular period of time. The discourse of tourism therefore focuses on destination and reflects a commercial purpose in its promotion of place. Also, in contrast with the timelessness of travel, tourist discourse is inextricably caught up in time, and this is what makes it superficial according to critics such as Fussell. The preoccupation with time is also evident in techniques such as temporal contrast, indicated by a change of tense, to suggest that individuals can exchange a past state of dissatisfaction for a pleasant experience at some future destination (Dann 1996). The tourist experience is thus characterised by its passivity - it is organized and planned rather than impulsive, it is guided rather than exploratory or adventurous, and its discourse has commercial motivations. There is, therefore, a discursive tension between travel and tourism.

Bakhtin’s concept of the basic unit of communication as an utterance that echoes the context in which it was previously used by others, explains the existence of such tensions. Each sphere of human activity has a corresponding set of utterances known as a speech genre. Utterances are characterised by addressivity (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 95), in other words they are audience-oriented, and are therefore self-presentational. The more familiar an individual is with these contexts, the better his or her expression of ideas. The message is more meaningful for the audience if it uses language drawn from contexts they recognise. From this perspective, new forms of travel-related communication such as microblogs may be regarded as innovatively combining pre-existing narrative styles of different travel-related speech genres ranging from the personal voice often reserved for travel writing, to the impersonal and factual tone of the guidebook. While this variety of discourses makes for a meaningful heteroglossic text, the contextual differences between previously disparate discursive forms can produce tensions in the text.

When presenting the self, individuals use cues, such as appearance or actions appropriate to specific social situations, to indicate their position with respect to their audience (Goffman, 1969). In an online self-presentational narrative this positioning uses a variety of multimedia (Nelson & Hull, 2008). In a Twitter page, this includes the content and discourses of posts, visual elements such as photographs and background themes as well features such as lists and hashtags. Controlling the amount of information available to an audience via these features is another self-presentational technique that, according to Goffman, influences the impression an audience has of the individual. For travel bloggers who use Twitter, such techniques could involve actions such as adding a hashtag to a tweet, thus making it available to a wider audience or prefixing the @ symbol to a username to have a more private conversation with another Twitter user.

Keeping these discursive differences in mind, this paper examines how individuals may use Twitter to present themselves as travel bloggers and sustain the themes of their blogs. Independent travel bloggers often link to each other via blogrolls, strengthen this connection via Twitter, and reiterate the positions they occupy in their blog. The sample chosen for analysis includes blogs with an established reputation as well as the lesser known blogs they link to. For example, Gary Arndt’s Everything Everywhere has featured in Time and Nomadic Matt’s Travel Site is easily located in a Google search for “travel blog” and is listed in many blogrolls. While such purposive sampling offers a practical approach to the detailed study of online messages with reliable results (Herring, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), as is often the case with such qualitative methods, a smaller sample offers little material for generalizations on this type of communication.

In order to understand how this self-presentation is communicated, the paper analyses the content and style of Twitter posts, considering in particular references to the travel
blog, the author as blogger, and the narration of the travel experience. Consequently, the following sections discuss titles, formal features such as profile pictures, user names, and links, and the conventions of Twitter messages relevant to self-presentation. This study also examines how links to other people and online content reiterate themes and connections of the travel blog. Ultimately, it considers how the networked self of the travel blogger and the dispersed content of the blog are negotiated in the discursive tensions between travel and tourism.

**Titles and Profiles on Twitter**

In general, the link to Twitter is indicated by a widget in the blog – a style used in travel blogs such as *A Wandering Sole*, *Traveling Savage*, and *Legal Nomads*. The clearly visible Twitter logo enhances the impression of a travel blogger as networked and of the travel blog as having distributed content. Some bloggers, like Leif Pettersen (2010a) of *Killing Batteries*, embed their Twitter stream in the home page of their travel blog, indicating that the blogger is in the process of networking with others. The *Traveling Savage* blog goes a step further by listing the Twitter usernames of authors featured on its blogroll (2010b). As the author, Keith Savage, links mainly to other travel bloggers who use Twitter, this display of connections to similarly networked travel bloggers via the blogroll shows him to be a networked travel blogger. It also suggests that, at least for Keith Savage, the presentation of the self as travel blogger involves displaying a connection to Twitter and presenting himself as a Twitter user.

Twitter users can display a personal name and a user name on their web pages. This personal name forms the page title, followed by the user name in the format personal name @user name. In general, the independent travel bloggers in this study create several title styles ranging from impersonal and blog-oriented to personal and self-oriented. Laura Walker of *A Wandering Sole* (2010a) and Eva and Jeremy Rees of *Forks and Jets* (2010a) use their blog title as a personal name and as a username. The resulting Twitter page titles read *A Wandering Sole @awanderingsole* (2010b), or *Forks and Jets @ForksandJets* respectively. Commercial tourism organizations use a remarkably similar style in their Twitter pages to emphasise corporate identity. Guidebook publisher Lonely Planet, for example, is Lonely Planet @lonelyplanet on Twitter (see Fig. 11). While this repetition of the blog title clearly identifies the context of the messages and keeps the blog ‘alive’ for any visitor, for an audience familiar with this and similar Twitter pages such as Frommers @FrommersTravel, or Virgin Atlantic @VirginAtlantic, can associate this style with commercial tourist discourse. This narrative technique increases the visibility of the blog, thus networking it, but downplays the self as blogger. Most other independent travel bloggers in this study use their personal names as their Twitter titles, followed by the name of their blog as a user name. Titles such as Jodi Ettenberg @legalnomads, Keith Savage @travelingsavage, or Anil @foxnomad give prominence to the authors, but also contextualise the page and call attention to their position as travel bloggers. This also clearly shows the page as an extension of the content in the blog. However, titles may focus solley on the author as an individual and have little or no reference to the travel blog. Leif Pettersen (2010b), for example, titles his page Leif Pettersen @leipettersen. While this style is more personal, suggesting an intimacy suited to the discourses of travel, it does not refer to the author as blogger. In fact, as a “freelance travel writer” of guidebooks and a “Lonely Planet author”, Pettersen associates himself with the discourse of professional writing rather than the personal discourse of the travel blog (2010b).

Profile descriptions often describe the author as a travel blogger, recapture themes of the blog, and end with a link to the blog. Gary Arndt, for example, is a “Travel blogger and
photographer... a one man National Geographic” (Arndt, 2010b). Likewise Anil Polat is a “Digital nomad traveling the world indefinitely” while Jodi Ettenberg is a “World traveler...writer & former lawyer” – terms that reflect the titles and profile descriptions of their blogs foXnoMad and Legal Nomads respectively (Ettenberg, 2010a; Polat, 2010a). These profiles restate positions occupied within the blog. However, Polat’s presentation of himself as a “digital nomad” is significant for its reference to travel as nomadic or in other words, timeless and not bound to destinations of a tourist itinerary. By calling himself a digital nomad, he clearly draws on the contexts of travel, and indicates that he is a traveller. Yet, the same term also implies that this self is also nomadic in a “digital” sense – not limited to the travel blog, but extended or “networked” across various digital platforms. He travels “indefinitely” not just in the offline world, but online as well.

In general, Twitter users post a profile picture and a short author description. Independent travel bloggers often use the same photograph of themselves that they display on their blog profiles. The effect of this technique is twofold. It extends the self as travel blogger to another platform and keeps it ‘alive’ for the audience. In addition, it signals a discursive style that is personal and consequently, more in the context of travel than tourism. Keith Savage’s Twitter profile photograph, for example, is identical to the one he uses in Traveling Savage thus sustaining the self as travel blogger. Those who do not use a personal photograph – and there are few such users in the sample selected for this study – may use visual elements from their blog. Forks and Jets authors Eva and Jeremy Rees (2010b) do not have a photograph of themselves, but instead use a logo based on their initials “EJ” (see Fig. 1) in a font that is identical to the one in their blog title. The “EJ” logo also appears as a URL icon or favicon. The logo resembles the “LP” logo used by guidebook publishers Lonely Planet on their Twitter page (Fig 2.). The page is impersonal in its reiteration of the “Forks and Jets” title, and the sparse description that identifies the authors merely as “a couple of amateur foodie traveloguers” (2010b). Furthermore, having a logo rather than a personal photograph can seem touristic, when seen in the context of tourism-related pages such as “Lonely Planet” that use similar visual elements. The design of the logo reflects the distributed nature of the blog rather than the networked self of its authors. Yet, the allusion to Eva and Jeremy Rees, indicated in the initials that make up the logo, has an element of personal discourse and is a reference, however oblique, to the self as travel blogger.

![Figure 1: The logo of the Forks and Jets blog (above) reflects in the Twitter profile picture (below) as seen on 22 November 2010.](image-url)
Another alternative to using a personal photograph is to have an image that reiterates themes in the blog. The profile picture of a travel blogger who uses the pseudonym Nomadic Matt depicts Uncle Traveling Matt, a character from the television show Fraggle Rock, who sends postcards and tells stories of his travels. The connotations of the character’s name act in the same manner as Gerard Genette’s “pseudonym effect” (1997, p. 48-50). Genette suggests that a name may be chosen deliberately, with an eye to its meaning and contexts, in the hope that a reader will recognize the connotations and contexts it is associated with. This influences the reader’s impression of the author and the work itself (Genette, 1997, p. 48-50). As an adventurous explorer, Uncle Travelling Matt is associated with travel rather than tourism. As a teller of stories, he symbolizes the narration of travel. Thus the contexts and connotations of the image work to present Nomadic Matt as a travel blogger.

The customized background of a Twitter page may also reflect the themes of a travel blog. The same sole-printed baggage tag featuring in the title banner of A Wandering Sole also appears on its Twitter page (Walker, 2010b). This indicates the distributed nature of the blog, provides a context for the audience, and implies that the same self as travel blogger is networked across these platforms. However, not all bloggers who use Twitter pages achieve such uniformity of theme. Gary Arndt’s page on Twitter, titled Everywhere Trip (2010b) is an echo of the blog title, Everything Everywhere (2010a). The complex background displays a number of travel-related icons such as postcards, a suitcase, and a pair of binoculars, against map wallpaper. While this gives a sense of the page as a travel-related text, the connection to the blog is not as obvious as Walker’s page, as it does not share visual elements with the blog itself.

Connections, Conventions, and Conversations @ Twitter

Twitter users connect with each other in several ways. Individuals may link to others on the platform and “follow” them. They may, in turn, have “followers”. Users can use the “@” symbol to engage others in conversation (Gilpin, 2010; Honeycutt & Herring, 2009). They may also “retweet” information or comments from other users (boyd, Golder, &
Lotan, 2010). Individuals may also use the hashtag “#” followed by a specific key word to start, contribute to, or follow a conversation surrounding a particular topic (Zhou, Bandari, Kong, Qian, & Roychowdhury, 2010). The following section discusses how authors employ technical features such as lists and conventions such as @, @user name, RT @user name, and hashtags to connect with others and present the self as travel blogger through the networking that takes place in these connections and conversations.

Each Twitter page displays the number of persons an author follows and is following. However, the follower count on Twitter is a poor indicator of how interesting or popular an independent travel blogger is. Gary Arndt had 106, 351 Twitter followers at the time of writing (2010b). While this may seem impressive to some visitors, others may be aware that some of these followers may in fact be web bots or spiders gathering data about certain topics (Teutle, 2010, p. 182). Evidently, the number of followers is a poor self-presentational element. However, a person may follow any number of users, and in fact individuals have different strategies for doing this (boyd, et al., 2010). Arndt categorizes the users he follows into lists on travel-related themes. These reflect the themes of his travel blog, and support Arndt’s description of himself as a “one man National Geographic” (2010b). Interestingly, “A comprehensive list of travel bloggers/podcasters on Twitter” is differentiated from “People involved in travel related public relations and marketing” (2010). This implies that, in Arndt’s eyes at least, the discourse of travel bloggers is distinct from the discourses of tourism marketing or public relations. The bloggers list also supports Arndt’s position as a travel blogger and places him in a network of similar authors.

Dawn R. Gilpin also argues that follower counts on Twitter are not as significant as the connections displayed when users communicate with each other. Conversations and interactions that take place on Twitter are essential to “identity construction” (2010, p. 234). Most Twitter conversations are prefaced by the @ symbol and user name (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009). The display of user names in each message means that by simply addressing comments to other bloggers, authors can indicate an association with the travel blogging community. Take, for example, this exchange between Nomadic Matt and another travel blogger, Backpacking Matt:

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 3:** A Twitter conversation between bloggers. The screenshot shows messages addressed to @backpackingmatt, @VoyageJason, and @adventurouskate
backpackingmatt @Matthew Kyhnn: Found a bungalow in Koh Phi Phi just in time for the clear blue skies to turn into a proper monsoon

nomadicmatt @Nomadic Matt: @backpackingmatt weren't u just in Bali? (2010a)

Although the tweets are in a travel context, they can hardly be regarded as distributing the content of the travel blog. However, the user names (identical to blog titles or pseudonyms) clearly identify this as a conversation between two bloggers for anyone familiar with the travel blogging community. If the audience does not recognize the authors’ user names, clicking on the message displays the accompanying description of backpackingmatt as a “Travel blogger exploring the world”. This clearly indicates Nomadic Matt’s association with other travel bloggers (see Fig. 3).

It should be noted here that this conversation is only visible to those who visit the Twitter pages of either blogger. Such is the nature of the technology that a person who follows either only Nomadic Matt or Matthew Kyhnn will not see any conversation between them that begins with the @username syntax on his or her (the follower’s) own page. However, a travel blogger can deliberately make such conversations more easily visible to their audience and so display the connection with similar authors by using a different narrative technique that places the @username later in the message, as Keith Savage does in this post: “travelingsavage Keith Savage: Having a brainstorm session with @globetrooper and @thefutureisred in #Argentina” (2010c). This tweet works as a self-presentational element by showing Savage as networking with other travel bloggers (both offline and on Twitter) and validating his position as a traveller through the mention of Argentina.

Bloggers often use the RT @user syntax to “retweet” a message from another user. A retweet may also be indicated by ‘retweeting @’, ‘retweet @’, ‘via @’ or by clicking on the retweet button in Twitter. Messages may be retweeted to attract attention, indicate loyalty, or to publicly agree with someone or validate their thoughts (boyd, et al., 2010). As the source of the retweet is usually easily visible, regardless of narrative technique, authors can indicate engagement with other travel bloggers, gain attention for themselves, show themselves to be loyal to this community, and so remind visitors that they are travel bloggers. For example, Gary Arndt’s retweet of Jodi Ettenberg’s post, “RT @legalnomads: New post: an afternoon in Paris’ Montmartre http://su.pr/1DsMRu #travel #lp”, identifies the context of this conversation as travel blogging and shows his connection with another travel blogger (2010b). He also strengthens his ties with this community by promoting Ettenberg’s new blog post, indicated in the link. In this case, the “#travel” and the mention of Paris also emphasises the travel theme. Retweeting a message that is a retweet in the first place also enhances presentation of a networked self via a display of several connections, if the original user’s name is retained, as with this Twitter post from Anil Polat: “foxnomad Anil: RT @holeinthedonut: RT @landlopers: The 2nd LandLopers Pick of the Week offers inspiration and gorgeous photos http://ht.ly/3cXmU” (Polat, 2010b). Such posts give a clear sense of the author as a networked travelblogger.

Hashtags are used in Twitter messages to engage in a more public conversation on a particular topic. The hyperlinked keyword used with the hashtag indicates the topic relevant to the content of the tweet and links to a public listing of all Twitter messages on the same subject. Therefore, hashtags related to travel or blogging can link a user to a public conversation around these themes and may be used to present the self as an independent travel blogger. Jodi Ettenberg’s message on her new post (see Fig. 4), mentioned as a
A retweet by Gary Arndt, uses #travel with the link to her blog post in a clear indication of its themes (2010b). However, the more interesting hashtag by far is the #lp tag in the same message. Guidebook publisher Lonely Planet instructs visitors to its Twitter page to use the #lp in any post they would like to have retweeted. On the one hand #lp is a self-promotional device for Ettenberg who seeks the attention of Lonely Planet and hopes to gain visibility in the process. On the other hand, it is also a means by which Lonely Planet generates content for its own page. In using #lp, Ettenberg associates herself with the touristic discourse represented by Lonely Planet, relying on the brand name to validate her message and promote her blog. Simultaneously, by retweeting her post the company manipulates the content of a personal message – in this case the link to the Legal Nomads – and draws on the reputation of the bloggers to enhance on its own brand image. Thus the #lp turns the message into a self-presentational element for both the blogger and the company. It represents the travel discourse of the blog and at the same time is turned into tourist discourse for the promotion of Lonely Planet. The resulting discursive tension is further heightened, in this case, by the presence of the #travel.

It is common for marketers to manipulate trending topics for their own purposes. Zhou et al.’s study of Twitter use in the 2009 Iranian election reveals that spammers used #IranElection to advertise their own websites. Similarly, most posts using containing #travelblog are generated by Travel Shop @travelagentshop, a website that promotes travel-related services in the UK (“Results for #travelblog,” 2010). Although #travelblog seems to be the obvious choice as a self-presentational element, it was in fact rarely used by these travel bloggers at the time or writing. At least some bloggers seem keen to avoid #travelblog's association with commercial tourist discourse. This validates the observation that while “many marketers wish to be in conversation with their consumers, not all consumers are looking to be in conversation with marketers” (boyd, et al., 2010). Ironically, it is in not using #travelblog that these authors present themselves as travel bloggers. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that this hashtag will prove useful in distributing the content of the blog.

Linking to the blog is perhaps the most straightforward technique for presenting the self as travel blogger and increasing the visibility of the blog via a post. In the period between July and November 2010, the Eva and Jeremy Rees posted three tweets, all of which distributed the content of their travel blog:

4 Aug

ForksandJets @Forks and Jets: Some thoughts about moving to Denver, CO http://bit.ly/b7mKj2 on www.forksandjets.com

29 Jul


23 Jul (Rees & Rees, 2010b)

It is possible that there were other posts during this period that were later deleted. Even so, it is significant that the Rees’s use tweets to present themselves as bloggers, and point audiences to their travel blog. However, authors may also share links that indicate aspects of self that have no relevance to their position as travel bloggers, or to themes in the blog, as in this tweet from Jodi Ettenberg: “The neuroscience of magic: http://bit.ly/fQfpPH” (2010c).

**TWEETING TRAVEL DISCOURSE**

There are a number of striking similarities in the discursive style of tweets and travel discourse, bearing out Baym’s observations on online language. Microblog posts are often personal and self-centred, describe activities and experiences, and are written in the present (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009; Oulasvirta, et al., 2010). To that extent, they employ the same narrative techniques as travel writing, which is also personal, focused on experience rather than destination, and written as if happening in the present. This is certainly the case with at least some of the posts from independent travel bloggers. For example, Jodi Ettenberg tweets about her trip to Milan, “Eating roasted chestnuts after climbing the Duomo and soon running off to my meetings. Trying to make the most of my 1 day in Milan!” (2010b). Similarly, Nomadic Matt also tweets while he travels on 22 November 2010: “30 more minutes and I land in Portland. Thank god. What a long day of travel. Must. Sleep. Soon” (2010b). Each of these tweets describes personal experience, is written in the present tense and mentions but does not describe destinations. For Ettenberg, the activity of eating chestnuts takes precedence over the (Milan) destination. Meanwhile, Nomadic Matt highlights the experience of travelling, particularly its discomfort – a theme that according to Camille O’Reilly is characteristic, of a description of a travel experience rather than a touristic one (2005).

There is also much in common between the travel-related tweet and the holiday postcard. Chris Kennedy finds that holiday postcards are generally used as a “relational” device, meant to strengthen ties between people (2005). Messages are usually written without much thought or planning and are essentially public, as anyone may read them. Content is usually general and lacking in detail, with locations mentioned but not described. Noting that the messages usually describe activities, accommodation, or personal physical appearance, Kennedy concludes that the language is generally positive and uses general terms. Although this research is based on a narrow sample, it is hard to ignore the
resemblances. A message on Twitter is probably as unplanned and is definitely public. The conversations and connections made via Twitter clearly indicate the relational aspect of travel bloggers’ tweets. In addition to this, the content of the messages is mundane and general in nature.

The postcard-like nature of the message is reflected in Leif Pettersen’s tweet on Bogota: “Bogota’s center teems with informal vendors. Absolute bedlam. Can buy anything. http://twitpic.com/3clofr” (2010b). This mention rather than the description of location, the emphasis on experience – “Absolute bedlam” – and the unplanned nature of the message all reflect the discursive style of the holiday postcard. The tweet links to a photograph of a market scene, but Pettersen does not specify where in Bogota this is. More significantly, the link to the photograph strengthens the parallels with the postcard in that it provides an image of the destination to accompany the message. Unlike postcards, however, this image does not depict an easily recognizable tourist icon. Firstly, this exemplifies how authors can manipulate familiar genres to a new form of communication. Secondly, it indicates how such changes can be self-presentation strategies. Tweets with links to travel-related photographs enhance the traveller position presented by authors in their blogs. Some travel tweets resemble postcard messages in their use of positive language to describe travel experiences. Nomadic Matt is enthusiastically tweets, “BKK is a city you grow to love. There’s a ton of great areas in it. It’s not a tourist city” (2010a). Even the word “not” is used in a positive context, highlighting that this is a traveller’s destination in being “not a tourist city”. Yet, there is also a touch of tourist discourse in the euphoric description of “a ton of great areas”. Keith Savage is similarly positive when he tweets, “Have you tried the fish and chips at the Pierowall Hotel in Westray, Orkney? Amazing!” (2010b). While the obscurity of the destination suggests travel rather than tourism, the focus on place and the exclamation mark is more suited to promotional tourist discourse. Thus the author’s presentation of the travel experience is situated in the discourses of both travel and tourism.

**THE NETWORKED SELF OF THE TRAVEL BLOGGER**

Central to this argument is the idea that the self as travel blogger is networked across multiple online platforms. As travel bloggers on Twitter use conventions and formal features in various ways to distribute the content and themes of their blogs, they draw on techniques familiar in other forms of travel-related communication. As various discourses and narrative techniques of travel and tourism combine on these Twitter pages, sometimes authors successfully extend their self-presentation and themes in the blog. In general, the display of connections to other travel bloggers through the use of various messaging conventions presents these bloggers as networked and networking with others. Visual elements, although sometimes touristic in style, often emphasise themes in the blog. However, the different discourses bring an underlying tension to these pages.

The significance of context is revealed in the use of hashtags. While a hashtag such as #Argentina links the tweet to a public conversation about this place, it serves mainly to position the author as a traveller. In Savage’s case, little is said about Argentina. Instead, the message highlights his association with other travel bloggers. This focus on experience is characteristic of travel discourse. In Ettenberg’s case, using #1p, associates her tweet with a brand name whose touristic contexts of guidebook-directed sightseeing are quite different from the “nomadic” style of travel suggested by her blog Legal Nomads. On the other hand, the use of #1p allows Lonely Planet to curate and provide access to a large amount of travel-related content created by travel bloggers. This has implications for self-presentation – Lonely Planet positions itself as an arbiter of taste, picking out content that is genuine and proving itself capable of recognizing the unique and extraordinary, that is to say what is
travel-like, in destinations that have become clichéd or touristic. At the same time it potentially sells travel-related products and services, and thus paves the way for tourism to the places described therein. This is by no means a one-sided relationship as bloggers such as Ettenberg benefit from this link as well. Such recognition from Lonely Planet reinforces their position as experts on travel. There is an attention economy at work here (Goldhaber, 1997), and further research into Lonely Planet’s use of other online platforms may offer a better understanding of how this organization relies on user-generated content to improve its visibility.

Quite often, a decision that emphasises themes and content of the blog detracts from a sense of the author as travel blogger and vice versa. For example, “Forks and Jets” on Twitter clearly distributes the blog, but cannot be said to network the bloggers. Authors such as Anil Polat appear to achieve a balance between dispersing the content of their blog and networking the self as travel blogger, easily incorporating references to both the blog and the self as blogger on the Twitter page. Others like Leif Pettersen make little reference to the blog itself. Furthermore, a feature that distributes the blog on one page may be used to present a blogger on another. The profile picture of “Forks and Jets” echoes the blog’s themes, but the photograph of Keith Savage refers to the self as travel blogger.

Authors can use Twitter in different ways to move beyond the boundaries of their travel blog, distribute its content, and express themselves as travel bloggers. In doing so, they combine discursive forms drawn from a variety of contexts. As authors control how information is dispersed and connections displayed, in order to maintain their self-presentation, they often employ narrative techniques drawn from the contexts of both travel and tourism. Although Twitter seems suited to the discursive style of travel and the presentation of a personal travel experience, elements of tourist discourse are also essential to increasing a blog’s visibility and expressing the self as travel blogger. Thus, the networked self of the independent travel blogger presented on Twitter is ultimately located in the tensions between the discourses of travel and tourism.

**ENDNOTES**

1. Kruse et al (1993) define a “widget” as “a simple graphical object, such as a pushbutton...or menu that allows users easy interaction with the program” (148). Although this definition is taken from the context of a computer program written for the study of spectrometry, it is useful to describe widgets in blogs.

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DANCING AROUND THE SUBJECT WITH ROBOTS: ETHICAL COMMUNICATION AS A “TRIPLE AUDIOVISUAL REALITY”

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Abstract: Communication is often thought of as a bridge between self and other, supported by what they have in common, and pursued with the aim of further developing this commonality. However, theorists such as John Durham Peters and Amit Pinchevski argue that this conception, connected as it is with the need to resolve and remove difference, is inherently ‘violent’ to the other and therefore unethical. To encourage ethical communication, they suggest that theory should instead support acts of communication for which the differences between self and other are not only retained, but also valued for the possibilities they offer. As a means of moving towards a more ethical stance, this paper stresses the importance of understanding communication as more than the transmission of information in spoken and written language. In particular, it draws on Fernando Poyatos’ research into simultaneous translation, which suggests that communication is a “triple audiovisual reality” consisting of language, paralanguage and kinesics. This perspective is then extended by considering the way in which Alan Fogel’s dynamic systems model also stresses the place of nonverbal signs. The paper explores and illustrates these theories by considering human-robot interactions because analysis of such interactions, with both humanoid and non-humanoid robots, helps to draw out the importance of paralanguage and kinesics as elements of communication. The human-robot encounters discussed here also highlight the way in which these theories position both reason and emotion as valuable in communication. The resulting argument – that communication occurs as a dynamic process, relying on a triple audiovisual reality drawn from both reason and emotion – supports a theoretical position that values difference, rather than promoting commonality as a requirement for successful communicative events. In conclusion, this paper extends this theory and suggests that it can form a basis for ethical communication between all kinds of selves and others, not just between humans and robots.

Keywords: Communication theory, communication ethics, language, paralanguage, kinesics, human-robot interaction

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INTRODUCTION

Successful communication is often thought of as dependent upon the transmission or exchange of information and/or the construction of, and a dependence upon, shared social understandings between individuals (Carey, 1992; Chang, 1996; Peters, 1999; Pinchevski, 2005). When described in these terms communication becomes understood as a bridge between interlocutors; a bridge that is not only founded on their commonalities, but that also seeks to develop those commonalities further. However, a number of theorists, including John Durham Peters and Amit Pinchevski, have argued that this reliance on resolving or eliminating the differences between communicators makes these conceptions of communication inherently ‘violent’ to the other and therefore unethical (Peters, 1999; Pinchevski, 2005). This paper, following Peters’ and Pinchevski’s lead, acknowledges ethical communication as an important goal for which to strive, and develops an understanding of communication that reassesses the difference between self and other as a valuable part of communicative processes. Its argument is supported by an analysis of the communication that occurs between humans and various different forms of robot, both in fiction and in real life.

Since the term ‘robot’ was first used, to refer to the artificial humans in the 1920 play R. U. R. (Rossum’s Universal Robots) written by Karel Čapek, the figure of the robot has provided a complex site within which many different perspectives about reason and emotion are juxtaposed. In addition, robots in both fiction and fact are often created with human-robot interactions in mind, and while in many cases the robots taking part in these interactions are humanlike in form, there are also examples in which communication occurs with robots whose difference is overtly represented. In choosing to write about communication with machines, animals and aliens, Peters suggests that “[b]y exploring our strangest partners” it is possible “to illuminate the strangeness that occurs in the most familiar settings” (1999, p. 231). While this idea is at the heart of this paper, what makes a consideration of the communication occurring between humans and robots particularly productive is the way in which robots are positioned on some occasions as familiar and humanlike, but on other occasions as strange, non-humanoid partners. An analysis of human-robot interactions can therefore be used to interrogate the placement of commonality and sameness, as well as to highlight the importance of difference and otherness, in communication and communication theory.

In this paper, two fictional robot examples and one real-life example are analysed as a means to draw out conceptions of communication theory. The first example involves a humanoid robot and illustrates the effects of the pursuit of commonality as a basis for communication, as well as a particular way of positioning reason and emotion. The subsequent examples of interactions with non-humanoid robots allow a broader exploration of the complex relationship between communication, emotion and reason. In particular, the value of nonverbal aspects of communication becomes clearly visible in these exchanges, as verbal language takes on less of a focus. Non-humanoid robots therefore draw attention to the opportunities offered by understanding communication in terms of a triple structure, as suggested by Fernando Poyatos (1983). Considering the overt otherness of communicative non-humanoid robots supports the argument that, whatever their form, the bodily expressions of communicators are valuable and should not be overlooked as an important aspect of their communication. Although this paper considers human-robot communication, its argument is not primarily concerned with the need to develop an ethical response to robots per se. Instead, it draws on examples of human interactions with robots – in which difference is sometimes less, and sometimes more, overtly represented – to suggest alternative ways to think about the importance of attending to reason and emotion, mind and body, as
important in promoting ethical communicative encounters between all different kinds of interlocutors.

**Humanoid robots, commonality and communication as a bridge**

My first example is that of Lieutenant Commander Data, an officer on the starship Enterprise, who appears in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* television series and feature films. Data is a fully autonomous humanoid machine, he reasons and makes decisions for himself in real time, and is therefore able to work alone or as part of a team in the same way as any other member of the crew. As his name suggests, he would seem best regarded as a technologically advanced, embodied, computer system. He is very nearly human in appearance, although he has some physical anomalies, such as his rather unusual eye colour, and the metallic sheen to his skin. In addition, there are some quirks in his behaviour that set him apart; for example, he rarely uses verbal contractions, saying “is not” instead of “isn’t”. Most notably, Data is described as not having humanlike feelings, and therefore as not easily expressing humanlike emotions. This means that his face retains a rather blank expression most of the time, although as I discuss below this is not always the case. In addition, Data is often unusually precise in what he says and shows a particular concern to provide detailed and accurate information. He uses a systematic approach to his interactions with humans, following turn-taking conventions very carefully to avoid interrupting others. Nevertheless, he is generally portrayed as communicating and interacting in very human ways with other members of the crew. It follows from this description that possibly the most appropriate communication theories with which to consider a machine like Data are particular readings of the cybernetic and semiotic traditions, those that focus on the precision coding of information using language, together with the accurate transfer or exchange of that coded information from one person to another.

The cybernetic tradition has its foundations in the work of scholars such as Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver (1948), Norbert Wiener (1948) and Alan Turing (1950), being drawn out of, and feeding back into, research into systems and information science, artificial intelligence and cognitive theory. The driving philosophical assumptions behind this tradition are concerned with materialism, rationalism and functionalism, the result being theory that regards all communication in terms of information processing and exchange within systems (Craig, 1999). Of course, Data’s construction as an embodied computer system only serves to link his design with cybernetic theory, and with what is known as the cybernetic tradition of communication, even more closely. As Robert T. Craig notes, the cybernetic tradition shares some “common ground” with other communication traditions, and in particular he highlights the similarity between the cybernetic and the semiotic traditions (1999, p. 142). For Craig, this similarity is based in the way that semiotics collapses “human agency into underlying or overarching symbol-processing systems” (1999, p. 142). A similar link, between semiotic communication as a means to “purge semantic dissonance”, and cybernetic communication as a process of “information exchange”, is also made by Peters (1999, pp. 12 & 24). However, this paper suggests that if one is to explain human communication as a process of information transfer or exchange, then it is useful to interweave semiotic and cybernetic theories of communication even more closely than either Craig or Peters. Semiotic theory describes communication in terms of the use of particular signs whose meaning is shared between interlocutors. It can therefore be argued that such intersubjective understandings of signs provide the means by which information is coded and decoded, and therefore accurately conveyed, in cybernetic models of the process of information exchange. In discussing human communication, and also communication with Data as a sophisticated humanlike machine, it is therefore suggested that a combined cybernetic-semiotic theory can be seen at work.
Data is able to accurately collate, analyse and disseminate many different kinds of information in familiar humanlike ways, and this would seem to make him a near perfect human-computer interface from the perspective of this cybernetic-semiotic model of communication. It can be suggested that Data’s precision and tendency to rely on reason as opposed to any emotional content produces human language that has to an extent been ‘machine coded’. This is also in keeping with the way that cybernetic-semiotic theory overlooks the possibilities of ambiguity or undecidability in human language, considering this to be a form of noise (Chang, 1996; Hayles, 2005). However, Data’s abilities still lead Craig to draw the conclusion that, from the perspective of the cybernetic tradition, Data “might be truly the most ‘human’ member of the Enterprise crew” (1999, p. 141). Craig’s comment emphasises the way that cybernetic, and therefore also cybernetic-semiotic, theories of communication are able to regard Data as “most ‘human’”, even in the absence of humanlike emotional expression (1999, p. 141). Thinking of Data in this way therefore validates the importance of reason, mind and language over emotion, face and body in humans and human communication.

Of course, what is missing from this analysis of Data, and Data’s communication, is the fact that he does show emotional expressions in many of the series’ episodes and films. It might be argued that Data’s occasional use of expressions simply shows how difficult it is for a human actor to appear consistently as an emotionless robot. However, the way in which the camera focuses on Data’s face on many different occasions indicates that, while he is understood not to have feelings, he is regarded as perfectly capable of learning the appropriate human emotional responses to particular situations. Therefore, although Data relies on his cybernetic-semiotic precision to communicate much of the time, he is also depicted as needing to be able to express some emotion in order to ‘connect’ with the rest of the crew as individuals and as a social group. These ideas draw on other areas of communication theory that are more open to the value of feeling and emotional expression, in particular the sociopsychological and sociocultural traditions.

Craig describes the sociopsychological tradition as theorising communication “as a process of expression, interaction and influence” (1999, p. 143). This theory therefore places expression, and this means not only semiotic expression but also emotional expression, as an important part of interpersonal communication. From this perspective, the semiotic precision of the message and the reduction of extraneous noise are no longer enough to ensure successful communication. Instead, in the sociopsychological tradition the success of communication is also dependent on the message’s influence on the receiver in light of their predispositions. Therefore even Data, whose communication is focused on cybernetic-semiotic excellence, demonstrates some ability to read social cues from others, although as discussed above, while he sometimes reacts to situations, his expressions are often rather limited.

The sociocultural tradition broadly describes communication as a “symbolic process through which reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed” (Carey, 1992, p. 23). Sociocultural communication is regarded both as depending upon, and as a means to maintain, the existing order of a social and cultural environment. As a part of his ‘life’ on the Enterprise, Data’s experiences and thoughts about emotions and feelings are often explored by the various storylines. At times his lack of emotion is highly valued, however on other occasions it is Data’s attempts to understand and to express human emotion that help him to be more easily accepted as part of the community onboard the starship. For example, Captain Picard clearly values Data’s unemotional nature when he remarks: “I only wish we were all so well balanced” (Roddenberry, 1988). However, storylines such as that relating to Data’s attempts to tell jokes emphasise the ways in which this helps to bring him
closer to those around him (Roddenberry, 1987).

Peters suggests that broadly it is in the late nineteenth century that communication acquired “its grandeur and pathos as a concept” with the coining of the words “solipsism” in 1874 and “telepathy” in 1882 (1999, p. 5). As he notes, both terms “reflect an individualist culture in which the walls surrounding the mind were a problem” (1999, p. 5). For solipsism the walls were “terrifyingly impermeable”, whereas for telepathy they were “blissfully thin” (Peters, 1999, p. 5). Since then, communication has been characterised in various forms, but most share the aim of somehow bridging the chasm between self and other. All of the theories discussed above suggest that commonality offers the means to create this bridge. Thus, while the question of Data’s humanness is complex, and his form and behaviour do at times only serve to stress his difference from the humans around him, more often emphasis is placed on the need for him to be as humanlike as possible. Interactions with Data therefore illustrate the idea of communication relying on commonality, whether based: in precision language, in accuracy of transmission, in mimicking expression and being part of a social system or in the idea that reason should be used to influence others with the aim of achieving agreement. However, Peters offers a strong critique of “the dream of communication as the mutual communion of souls” and the “pervasive sense that communication is always breaking down” (1999, p. 1). In particular, he argues that if communication “is taken as the reduplication of the self (or its thoughts) in the other”, an idea directly illustrated in the creation of Data, then “it deserves to crash, for such an understanding is in essence a pogrom”, an organised massacre, “against the distinctness of human beings” or indeed, as I’ll argue below, against the distinctness of any form of being (1999, p. 21). Instead, Peters suggests that a better course might be to “renounce the dream of communication while retaining the goods it invokes”, with the aim of finding “an account of communication that erases neither the curious fact of otherness at its core nor the possibility of doing things with words” (1999, p. 21).

Peters’ approach to developing ethical communication is to set aside the need for reciprocity, and therefore the valorisation of ideal communication as dialogues based in “the capacity to communicate on an even footing” (1999, p. 62). Instead, he revisits the concept of communication as dissemination, since it offers the chance to “meet others with some fairness and kindness” (1999, p. 62). However, while he clarifies that “[o]pen scatter is more fundamental than coupled sharing”, Peters nonetheless regards it as “the stuff from which, on rare splendid occasions, dialogue may arise”, a comment which suggests that dialogue retains its position as an exceptional form of communication (1999, p. 62). Peters is clearly sensitive to the idea of valuing difference between interlocutors, but he does not conclude that communication is impossible: that interlocutors are so divided by their differences that they cannot come to understand one another at all. Instead, by embracing a pragmatist approach drawn in the main from John Dewey, he is encouraged to characterise communication as “the project of reconciling self and other” (1999, p. 9).

While this is a positive way to proceed in considering communication and difference, Peters’ formulation would seem to be undermined somewhat by the ease with which dissemination can be understood to favour the most powerful voice, as well as the relatively fine line between “reconciling self and other” and the “mutual communion of souls” (1999, p. 9 & 1). In response to the need for encouraging a positive appraisal of difference between interlocutors, this paper argues that, rather than just trying to do “things with words”, it is also vital to accept a broader sense of communication for which nonverbal as well as verbal signs are valuable. In particular, it is useful to draw on Poyatos’ conception of the “triple audiovisual reality” of communication, “what we say – how we say it – and how we move what we say” (1997, p. 249). For Poyatos, a researcher into the subtleties of simultaneous
translation, communication consists of: verbal language, speech itself; paralanguage, non-verbal voice qualities, modifiers and sounds used to support meaning; and kinesics, the body language of face, eye and hand movements, and also overall body movements, postures and manners (1997, p. 249). This paper therefore combines an attention to the triple structure of communication, offered by Poyatos’ theory, with a consideration of communicative acts as moments of encounter between selves and others during which difference is seen as an integral part of communication as opposed to being a problem to be overcome. An understanding of communication as this kind of encounter, or event, is associated with the phenomenological tradition, which is described by Craig as being concerned with the “experience of otherness” in authentic relationships “founded on the experience of direct, unmediated contact with others” (1999, p. 138). From a phenomenological perspective, recognising the importance of difference, or otherness as it is termed in many phenomenological theories, as well as the presence of bodies, is a key part of ethical communication. It is with an attendance to otherness and the presence of bodies, along with an understanding of the triple structure of communication, that the second example of human encounters with robots, which are radically different from Data, is introduced.

**Non-humanoid robots, difference and the dynamic ‘dance’ of communication**

The Fish-Bird project is the result of a long-term collaboration between the artist Mari Velonaki and roboticists at the Centre for Social Robotics in Sydney. This robotic art installation consists of two robots in the form of wheelchairs, which interact with one another and also with people who enter the installation space.

Each wheelchair has been given an individual personality, based on two characters from a Greek myth, Fish and Bird, and in keeping with their ancient namesakes the modern day Fish and Bird have fallen in love, “but cannot be together due to ‘technical’ difficulties” (Velonaki, 2010, p. 3). The robots have various patterns of behaviour that control their movements. They also develop specific “artificial ‘emotional’ states” in response to their perceptions of the movements of the other robot and of humans that enter the installation space (Fish-Bird: Background, 2006, no page). A large part of their communication can therefore be understood through the term kinesics. In addition, each robot prints notes with a thermal printer using a different handwriting style, and a robot’s emotional state also af-

![Figure 1: The Fish-Bird project](image-url)
fects which texts are chosen for printing. The fragments of text are taken from donated love-letters, the works of the poet Anna Akhatova and a text written by Velonaki herself. Their use of text means that these robots also (to an extent) therefore use language.

When they are together without visitors the robots take part in a constant stream of interaction with one another, indicated both by their movements, and their choice of the more personal texts. When a visitor enters their installation space the interaction between Fish and Bird is interrupted and the robots turn to ‘face’ the person that has entered. Visitors are therefore understood to “disturb the intimacy of the two characters”, and in this initial moment of encounter people become aware that the robots are “responding to them in real time, rather than moving in a repetitive automatic manner” (Velonaki, 2010, pp. 3 & 5). The robots cease to exchange personal messages and start to talk about trivialities such as the weather, in what might be understood as a common reaction to the presence of a stranger. As visitors begin to explore different ways of interacting with the robots their movements cause varied responses, the intention and mood of the robots being shown through their speed and direction of movement. For example, “[a] robot indicates dissatisfaction or frustration during interaction ... by accelerating to a distant corner, where it remains facing the walls until its ‘mood’ changes” (Velonaki, 2010, p. 3). This description of Fish and Bird indicates that these robots have been designed with a sense of emotion and reason firmly embedded together and operating in a connected way. Emotion is present in the notes and the choice of those notes, and also, possibly even more clearly, in the movements of the robots around one another and their human visitors. What is also clear from considering these robots is the way in which the kinesic channel works so well to communicate these emotional cues, while also continually stressing the differences between the robots and humans.

Velonaki suggests that dialogues are able to develop between the robots and their visitors as the wheelchairs move around based on their “‘perception’ of the body language” of the humans, who then proceed to react in their turn “to the ‘body language’ of the wheelchairs” (2006, p. 74). However, they might be better thought of in more dynamic terms, because in these interactions a reliance on the nonverbal kinesic communication channel, together with the production of notes as opposed to spoken language, promotes an understanding of communication which is less about turn-taking in dialogue, and more about a continuous process in which signs overlap, even as they are produced by the participants. This setting aside of turn-taking rules, however, does not mean that the participants are not paying attention to one another, instead the moments of attention and response intermingle in a more dynamic and flowing way. As Donna Haraway suggests, the result is that this kind of “embodied communication is more like a dance than a word” (2006, p. 111; 2008, p. 26).

Haraway develops her understanding in part from the work of Barbara Smuts, in particular Smuts’ observations of greeting rituals in baboon society and, closer to home, communications taking place with her dogs. In addition to Haraway’s suggestion, Smuts herself describes her relationships with her dogs as “a perpetual improvisational dance, co-created and emergent, simultaneously reflecting who we are and bringing into being who we will become” (2006, p. 115). Smuts’ description is drawn from the work of Shanker and King, who suggest that the “dance metaphor” and the “dynamic systems paradigm” that underpins this description of communication have become prevalent in a number of areas of communication research, citing ape language research, nonverbal communication research and infant development research (2002, p. 605). However, the dance metaphor is also an appropriate way to explain Fish and Bird’s communications, both with one another and with human visitors. Not only have these robots been programmed with “the capabil-
ity to perform detailed ‘choreographed’ sequences” as part of their movements, but there is also a clear sense of dance present more broadly in the patterns that humans and robots make as they move around one another in the installation space (Fish-Bird: Background, 2006, n.p.).

Stuart Shanker and Barbara King identify the central focus of the dance metaphor as “co-regulated interactions and the emergence of creative communicative behaviors within that context” (2002, p. 605). This perspective on communication therefore concentrates more on the interaction and the development of the relationship, than on the individual participants. In particular, Shanker and King draw upon the work of Alan Fogel, who has developed a conception of co-regulation as a process that “occurs whenever individuals’ joint actions blend together to achieve a unique and mutually created set of social actions” (1993, p. 6). Fogel stresses that “[c]o-regulation arises as part of a continuous process of communication, not as a result of an exchange of messages borne by discrete communication signals” (1993, p. 6). It is therefore only possible to consider co-regulation from a perspective for which communication consists of information moving in a “continuous process system”, or “dynamic system” to use Shanker and King’s terminology, as opposed to a “discrete state system” (Fogel, 1993, p. 65).

Drawing on the descriptions of communication presented in this paper, it is the cybernetic-semiotic conception of communication that is most clearly placed within a discrete state system. In such a system “there are senders and receivers” and “[t]he purpose of communication is for the sender to alter the behavior of the receiver by transmitting informative messages” (Fogel, 1993, p. 65). In contrast, as Fogel clarifies in a more recent paper, in a dynamic system:

[w]ords, gestures, and expressions can be altered in their shape, intonation, size, explicitness, duration, clarity, force, and on many other dimensions depending upon the ongoing and simultaneous flow of communicative actions. (1993, p. 13)

Robots such as Fish and Bird, in their interactions with one another and with human visitors, can be understood to demonstrate this type of “ongoing and simultaneous flow of communicative actions” and, although they do not use “[w]ords, gestures, and expressions” in the same ways as humans, they nonetheless express themselves through their own forms of language, paralanguage and kinesics. In addition, while Fish and Bird initially greet their human visitors as strangers, indicated by their somewhat wary movements and discussions of the weather, if their visitors remain calmly present within the installation space then the robots begin to communicate about their relationship once again, and may even write messages directly addressed to the humans. Encounters with Fish and Bird therefore illustrate not only a dynamic situation of communication, but also the way in which relationships change over time. The behaviour of these robots indicates the reappraisal of human ‘strangers’ as somewhat familiar. However, even as this occurs it is also quite clear that the differences between these robots and their visitors remain, such that the robots and humans are still other to one another.

The dance metaphor and dynamic systems theory enables development of a conception of communication that is far less like a bridge, and is instead better understood as a complex navigation of self and other in a dynamic process of meaning creation. This understanding of communication does not rely on sameness or commonality; instead it is the constantly evolving relationship that forms during the interaction that supports communication and offers the possibility of coordinated action, of “doing things” as Peters asks (1999,
p. 21). However, it may still seem that this theory provides a less precise idea of communication than the theory discussed in relation to Data, and it is also difficult to see how such a conception of communication explains how things might be done in the real world. Therefore, the final example in this paper is chosen to help describe more clearly how otherness, and the coordination of diverse individuals working together to complete joint tasks, might coexist successfully.

**Communicating and working with non-humanoid robot others**

R2-D2 is a non-humanoid robot, or droid, that plays a central role within the *Star Wars* films, most often in the company of the humanoid robot C-3PO. R2 is described as an “astromech droid” or an “astro-droid” within the films, a class of robot used to service and repair all different kinds of machinery, including starships. The astromech droids, R2 included, do not speak using a human language, but instead produce their own language that consists of a range of electronic noises that 3PO, as a “protocol droid” specialising in translation, is able to interpret for the other characters in the films. Many different examples of both protocol and astromech droids are shown at work in various scenes, but in the same way that 3PO is the only protocol droid to play a major speaking role, R2 is the only astromech droid whose character is fully developed by the storylines.

In contrast with the placement of Data, as an expert cybernetic-semiotic communicator, it is unclear how easily R2’s language of beeps and other noises could ever be understood fully by humans. R2’s inability to speak any form of humanlike language means that he cannot be regarded as skilled in cybernetic-semiotic communication with humans, yet nonetheless he is shown to play a major part in the rebel alliance’s fight against the empire. The actions and role of R2-D2 therefore continually raise the question of how such a decidedly non-humanoid astromech droid’s communicative abilities can support its seemingly vital role throughout the *Star Wars* films. To explain this mismatch, between R2’s production of nonhuman language instead of human-recognisables words, and his importance to the rebels’ plans, it should first be noted that while 3PO translates R2’s electronic beeps for humans, he always speaks to R2 using human language. R2 may not be able to produce speech, but he clearly understands human language with ease. This demonstration of R2’s ability to understand in this way helps to explain how easily he is charged with carrying out specific missions, and knows of detailed rebel plans, about which 3PO often knows nothing.

However, if R2’s communication is analysed in terms of Poyatos’ conception of paralanguage and kinesics, as opposed to concentrating wholly on language, it is easier to see how this robot can act as an effective colleague and companion. Early in the film *Star Wars: A New Hope* 3PO and R2 have been taken by Jawa traders while trekking across the Tatooine desert in an attempt to find Obi-Wan Kenobi. Luke Skywalker and his Uncle Owen need to buy some new droids, and 3PO is swiftly chosen, along with a different model of astromech droid. As 3PO and the other droid move off, R2 shuffles from side to side, producing plaintive beeps as he is left behind. Luckily the other astromech droid malfunctions, and R2 takes his chance to attract attention by beeping loudly and bobbing up and down. After a short altercation, and some encouragement from 3PO, R2 is picked as a replacement and he is able to join his humanoid companion. However, when 3PO suggests that he should be grateful, R2’s paralinguistic response, a rudely blown raspberry, clearly expresses that he is very unimpressed with this idea.

From this example, it seems that the aspect of R2-D2’s communication most readily understood not only by other characters in the films, but also by the audience, is the emo-
tional content. R2-D2 can therefore be understood as an “emotional” robot, whose emotion is conveyed very effectively through paralanguage and kinesics, in the absence of a human-like face and body. In addition, this interchange at least begins to demonstrate the way in which movement and sounds also provide cues to support coordinated action with R2, as he is able to draw attention to himself when required by use of sound, body and “head” movements. Reading R2’s communication in this and other situations gives film viewers the sense that his emotions play a role in the decisions he makes, and in addition that emotions are a major part of his communication. It is his communicative actions that establish R2 as a well-developed character or personality, vulnerable, courageous and sometimes rude (in particular to 3PO). The cues that R2 produces through paralanguage and kinesics are able to provide the same kind of dynamic and overlapping communicative effect as was discussed for Fish and Bird. Working with R2 therefore might also be best understood in terms of the dance metaphor, as opposed to through a strict turn-taking structure.

It should be noted that this positioning of R2, as an essential member of the resistance team, stands out in stark contrast with the assumption, made by many real-life roboticists, that robots with non-humanoid form, movement and communication ability would be less valuable as workers in human-robot teams. Only a few roboticists think otherwise, for example Matthew Johnson, Paul Feltovich and Jeffrey Bradshaw note that examples from science fiction, citing R2 in particular, “suggest how effective simple robots can be in interaction with humans” (2008, p. 6). Johnson et al also note, and indeed their paper is entitled, “R2 Where Are You?”, that the translation of this non-humanoid conception of the robot helper into real life has been slow. I would suggest that this is because roboticists are more comfortable with the more clear cut idea of communication as transmission of information, than the dynamic systems approach, and with the idea of coding in language as opposed to the overlapping, and less structured use of nonverbal signs. However, while acknowledging that it might well be particularly useful to be able to give a robot such as R2 spoken instructions, Johnson et al appear open to the idea that human-robot interaction is not dependent on designing robots with humanlike form and the ability to use human language. In contrast, their paper focuses instead on the idea that, in order to be able to work with humans, a robot needs to be able to collaborate in many different situations in a flexible way, with its nonverbal communications seen as sufficient to support coordinated action. It would seem that this need for flexibility would be well catered for by a robot able to take part in a dynamic process of communication, enabling a co-regulated tailoring of joint action between human and robot as they work together towards a particular goal. What is also clear is that such joint action is possible even when self and other are considerably different from one another, as in the case of R2 and Luke Skywalker who are portrayed as developing a close partnership in the films.

**CONCLUSION**

The first example presented in this paper illustrated the ways in which various traditions of communication theory are assumed to be reliant upon the similarities between communicators, an idea that is overtly illustrated by the creation of humanoid robots. However, in contrast, the second and third examples, involving non-humanoid robots, have stressed the ways in which otherness and difference can be placed as important aspects of communication, through turning to focus on the eloquent use of nonverbal communication channels in human-robot interactions. However, Geoffrey Bennington suggests that otherness, difference and difficulty should have a more valued place in all human communication and offers two scenarios as examples. In the first:

Someone comes and says something. Without really needing to think, I understand
what is said, refer it without difficulty to familiar codes, would assign meaning and intention confidently if questioned about them, and possibly I even reply. This situation of ‘communication’, in its banality, is one in which nothing much happens: information may be transmitted, contact maintained, an order given and received, but nowhere is the established normality of language use or its associated ‘forms of life’ called into question. (1994, p. 1)

Here, Bennington describes a moment of communication that can be explained by recourse to the cybernetic-semiotic transmission of information, the sociocultural maintenance of social order, or the sociopsychological understanding of influencing others to do one’s will. In this scenario difference may not be present, and if it is then it is destined to be eliminated, because as Bennington remarks, nothing is “called into question”. However in the second scenario:

Someone comes and says something. This time I do not quite understand, or am not entirely sure of having understood. Something in what is said, or the manner of its saying jars, doesn’t quite fit, seems perhaps to break a rule or transgress a norm, be it phonetic, grammatical, semantic, sociolectal, paralinguistic, behavioural. Something appears to have been meant or intended, but I am less confident … about what exactly it is. In this situation, something has happened: an event, however small, has occurred … an uncertainty opens up: maybe it isn’t just that this utterance breaks the rules – maybe this follows other rules, and if it does, might not those rules aspire to replace my own? Maybe these rules are better rules? Or is this a tricky attempt to talk me into something? (1994, p. 1)

Here, while the communication that takes place is still linked to the use of human language, the scenario is more open to the effects of nonverbal communication, and the presence of emotion and reason. Otherness is overtly placed, notably in ways that include the “paralinguistic and behavioural”, and Bennington has described a dynamic situation, one in which questions are raised over the difference that has been brought to light, with the suggestion that “[m]aybe these rules are better rules”.

This paper therefore suggests that viewing communication as a dynamic process – involving the development of a triple audiovisual reality drawn out of both the reason and emotion of interlocutors – supports a theoretical position that values difference, rather than promoting commonality as a requirement for successful communicative events. Although the conception of communication suggested here arose from considering human-robot interactions, as the brief analysis of Bennington’s scenarios shows, it can be extended to offer new ways to promote ethical communication in many different self-other encounters including those in which robots are not participants.

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SHIFTING ONLINE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY INTO PR CONSULTANTS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS NEW MEDIA

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Abstract: This study set out to explore the current usage and knowledge of new media as a public relations tool and channel amongst practising public relations consultants in Australia. The research was motivated by a nationwide benchmarking study by de Bussy and Wolf (2009), which concluded that new media was an extremely low priority for Australian public relations practitioners. Taking into account the speed of change associated with new media adoption, the authors examine whether these findings are still true today.

This study takes a qualitative approach, based on a critical analysis of semi-structured interviews with Western Australia (WA) based Registered Consultancy Group (RCG) members of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) (n=7). Findings suggest a cautious attitude towards the benefits of new media amongst RCG consultants. This is largely based on the assertion that the dynamics of basic communication principles and theories have not changed and that there is consequently no perceived pressure to move into the new media sphere half heartedly.

INTRODUCTION

US President Obama’s election win was largely accredited to the use of new media, in what is now referred to as Campaign Obama, which was recognised with two major accolades in the 2009 inaugural Cannes PR Lion Awards (http://www.canneslions.com). Australians may have watched the US presidential elections from the sidelines, however, recent data provided by Nielsen Media Research (Nielsenwire, 2010) highlights that they are rapidly increasing their participation in the social media environment, including content sharing, with Twitter usage growing by 400 per cent last year. Close to three in four (73 per cent) of those Australians that are already online have looked at others’ profiles on social networks. Most of the country’s federal politicians are now tweeting about their life in the pub-
lic eye. These statistics arguably lead to the assumption that Australian public relations practitioners have fully embraced new media. Based on its interactive features, new media channels arguably reinforce Grunig and Dozier’s (1992) notion of two-way symmetrical communication as best practice in public relations. However, why – according to findings by de Bussy and Wolf (2009) - are public relations practitioners apparently so reluctant to use these new tools in a professional context?

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**NEW MEDIA – A BRIEF DEFINITION**

New media is commonly associated with information sharing, user generated content and collaboration. Social media in particular have changed the dynamics of communication by shifting from the broadcasting of company messages and retrieval of information to interactive facilities (Church, 2008). As audiences are becoming increasingly cynical and advertising savvy, they move online to rely on peer recommendations rather than sales messages (illustrated in the success of portals such as expedia.com).

Whilst definitions vary, the authors refer to new media as interactive tools, thereby using O’Reilley’s (2005) description as “harnessing collective intelligence”. This includes online communities, social networking (e.g. LinkedIn, Friendster, Facebook), social bookmarking, blogging (including vlogging and microblogging), video and photo sharing, mashups, wikis, podcasts, tagging, RSS feeds, apps, interactive maps and other online based tools.

**BENEFITS OF NEW MEDIA – A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

New media – at least theoretically – provide a range of advantages for PR professionals, particularly in regards to monitoring, environmental scanning (Kent, 2008; McAllister & Taylor, 2007) and knowledge management (Razmerita, Kirchner, & Sudzina, 2009). Blogs and online news provide an opportunity to stay abreast of breaking news and trends. Microblogging sites such as Twitter have been particularly highlighted in playing a key role in breaking a number of news stories, such as the 2008 natural disasters in China and Myanmar (Church, 2008) and the Iranian elections, by avoiding country wide media restrictions (Grossman, 2009). Being present online also means building relationships with journalists, who are increasingly recognising online media as information sources (Garrison, 2004).

Most importantly, new media allow public relations practitioners to engage with various stakeholder groups, a direct contrast to the asymmetrical Web1.0 broadcasting channels, such as traditional websites (Chartered Institute of Public Relations, 2009, 2010; Church, 2008; McAllister & Taylor, 2007; Van Der Merwe, Pitt, & Abratt, 2005). They provide an opportunity to monitor stakeholder attitudes towards a brand and enable real time engagement with dissatisfied customers as well as self-declared evangelists. Consequently, new media tools have been identified as particularly useful in issues and crisis management situations (Heath, 1998; Perry, Taylor, & Doerfel, 2003; Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011; Stephens & Malone, 2009).

Scholars have furthermore argued that the Internet has empowered PR practitioners to expand their roles and elevate their own status in their respective organisations, by using the web as an intelligence gathering tool (Porter & Sallof, 2005), maintaining their own blog (Porter, Sweetser Trammell, Chung, & Kim, 2007), and by making the most of social networking tools (Diga & Kelleher, 2009).
**Limitations of New Media**

New media tools are frequently referred to as ‘cheap’ or even ‘freely available’ (e.g. Cook & Hopkins, 2008), however, whilst the software itself might be free of charge, the demand on resources in terms of maintenance, commitment and time is frequently underestimated. As Kent (2008) emphasises, “A blog will only be useful to an organisation if it has someone to maintain it, someone trained in effective dialogic communication, and someone who has the trust of individuals and publics” (p. 39).

Furthermore, the introduction of new tools will place additional pressure on practitioners, as traditional media demands on public relations practice are unlikely to be reduced significantly (James, 2007). Finally, the fact that new media technologies are presenting a low cost opportunity, means they are highly attractive for activist groups and other low budget organisations (Heath, 1998), thereby arguably emphasising the need for constant environmental scanning, and communication, as stakeholders will turn to alternative sources if no official response is available (Stephens & Malone, 2009).

**PR Literature on New Media**

According to PR literature, the Internet in general and new media technologies in particular have transformed (Gregory, 2004), if not revolutionised (Porter, Sweetser, & Chung, 2009), the communications industry. It is argued that we are seeing “a new generation of Internet-based tools that allow for far greater levels of two-way interaction, discussion and conversation” (Cook & Hopkins, 2008, p.1).

Industry reports further emphasise the novelty of social media tools, referring to a “paradigm shift” (Edelman & Intelliseek, 2005), entirely new challenges and opportunities, thereby implying a new era in communication. Respondents in Eyrich et al’s (2008) study had reportedly adopted “nearly” six different social media tools, the Digital Readiness Report (iPressroom, 2009) found that social media knowledge amongst US practitioners was particularly important during the recruitment process and the UK-based Keynote report stated that social media marketing had become the norm in Europe (Chartered Institute of Public Relations, 2010). So why did a nationwide benchmarking study by de Bussy and Wolf (2009) find that Australian PR professionals appear to be somewhat reluctant in their adoption of new media tools and channels?

Cook and Hopkins (2008) claimed that Australian organisations lag behind their overseas counterparts in regards to new media integration. However, this may not be the only reason for PR practitioners’ apparent caution. When revisiting some of the recent, predominantly US-based studies, it becomes obvious that the initial wave of enthusiasm may have equally worn off in other countries. Porter et al. (2007) stated that US practitioners see the importance of blogs, but are not using them as standard public relations tools. Lenhart and Fox (2006) found that most of the PR practitioners in their study kept personal, rather than professional online journals. The research team consequently lost 26 per cent of their respondents in a follow up survey as “they were no longer keeping a blog or were not willing to take another survey” (p. 2). The following quote by Somerville et al. (2007) may emphasise a crucial point that is easily forgotten and overlooked in the rush to promote new communications tools:

New media technologies are not a panacea, they are not in themselves a solution to the complex communication issues in today’s dynamic socio-economic environment. Rather it is practitioners themselves who must take responsibility for the practical and strategic decisions about which technologies to adopt and how they utilize them (p. 210)
GAPS IN CURRENT LITERATURE

Scholarly publications on new media have traditionally been US-centric (e.g. Eyrich, et al., 2008; Porter & Sallot, 2005; Porter, Sweetser, & Chung., 2009; Porter et al., 2007), with a strong focus on ‘how to’ literature (e.g. Fathi, 2008; Hallett, 2008; Stewart, 2008; Steyn, van Heerden, Pitt, & Boshoff, 2008). Most studies have focused on either blogging as a communications tool (e.g. Hallett, 2008; Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004; Porter, Sweetser, & Chung, 2009; Porter et al., 2009; Porter et al., 2007; Yang & Lim, 2009; Youngs, 2009) or the use of micro-blogging, particularly Twitter (e.g. Church, 2008; Fathi, 2008; Stewart, 2008; Wylie, 2009), looking at how to make the most of the 140 characters available when pitching to journalists, responding to stakeholders or simply following breaking stories. The limited amount of empirical studies have predominantly looked at usage of new media technologies from the outside in, focused on analysing websites (e.g. Alfonso & de Valbuena Miguel, 2006; Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003), corporate blogs (e.g. Kent, 2008; Youngs, 2009) or Facebook pages. However, scholarly and industry research to date has largely failed to look at new media tools beyond blogging. Industry reports (e.g. Chartered Institute of Public Relations, 2010; Edelman & Intelliseek, 2005; McKinsey, 2007) provide further insight, but nevertheless leave equally as many questions unanswered.

Studies may indicate limited new media adoption, but essentially fail to investigate the causes behind it. There is an apparent lack of in depth insight and primary investigations into PR professionals’ attitudes towards new media, particularly within the Australian context. One exception is de Bussy and Wolf’s (2009) State of PR study, which concluded that although practitioners were relatively familiar with new media tools, they were perceived as an extremely low priority within a professional context. Main reasons stated for the lack of new media adoption were “not considered relevant to target stakeholder(s)”, “lack of familiarity”, “lack of training”, “lack of time”, “budget restraints” and “fear of criticism or negative feedback voiced via social media”. As this was a largely quantitative study, the researchers identified a need to gain a more in-depth insight into how the industry’s adoption of new media might have changed, as well as associated barriers.

Two other notable exceptions are recent, critical approaches which have examined attitudes of public relations practitioners in the region – specifically in New Zealand (Toledano, 2010) and Singapore and Malaysia (Fitch, 2009a, 2009b). Practitioners in New Zealand, surveyed in 2009, were seen to be “struggling” to adapt to the new media environment, with more than half of respondents not using social media to communicate with stakeholders (Toledano, 2010). Toledano (2010) argued that this vacuum could well be filled by new professionals with different skills and the profession is at a “crucial crossroad” (p 233). Meanwhile, when surveyed in mid-2006, practitioners in Singapore and Malaysia were found to be ambivalent towards new media (Fitch, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

This formative study took a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews (six face-to-face and one by phone) with seven of WA’s eight Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) registered consultancies. Only one registered consultant, a sole trader, did not respond to interview requests. The interviews were conducted in the middle of 2010, and ranged in time from 32 to 105 minutes. Registered consultancies were chosen because they are perceived as the experts that clients turn to for current and timely advice. Consultants have an advantage by working across a range of accounts, and therefore might conceivably have their fingers on the new media pulse. In addition, RCG members could arguably be seen as being committed to professional development and ethical practice by
virtue of their membership. Interviewees were predominantly the most senior consultant and/or owner of the business. In one case a consultant was interviewed who was perceived to be the agency’s expert on new media integration. The qualitative research approach is guided by the underlying principle of gaining rich, in-depth information (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). This was deemed to be appropriate to uncover the reasons behind, or caution in adoption of new media, by focusing on the meaning rather than the measurement of social phenomena (Hussey & Hussey, 1997). Rich and thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) were gathered from all participants.

For this study, an interview guide was prepared and ethics approval gained from the researchers’ University Ethics Committee. An information sheet was provided to participants and informed verbal consent was gained. Digital recordings were made of all interviews, with a tape backup recording, plus handwritten notes. Each interview was transcribed and coded independently by the two researchers in NVivo 8.

LIMITATIONS

Insights from this study are drawn from a limited sample size (n=7), due to the modest size of the West Australian consulting industry. The WA PR industry differs from its interstate neighbours in that it is primarily focused on the resources and energy sector, due to the State’s continuing mining boom. In contrast to Sydney and Melbourne, FMCG clients are highly limited, as are non-mining related company headquarters. Consequently, WA-based consultants focus largely on business to business communication, lobbying and shareholder campaigns. All RCG members represent independent consultancies. Only one national and one international consulting network are represented in the state, one of which is a registered member in the network’s home state (NSW). Consequently, Perth-based consultancies tend to be boutique sized.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

WEB2.0 – “A TERM I AM NOT FAMILIAR WITH”

During our interviews we referred to the term Web2.0, which has been frequently used to describe new media tools and channels. Although most of our interviewees had heard about it, they remained rather sceptical about its value and application:

“Web2.0 is a phrase that I hear from time to time and it seems that the little that I have read about it... there seem to be these experts writing about it who all have different views about what it is and what it’s trying to be. So when faced with those kinds of things I tend to say, ‘S*** - when you work it out, you let me know’. I don’t know whether it’s just a phrase that’s been bandied around or if it’s any different to internet usage.”

With one exception, consultants downplayed their involvement and use of new media. In the State of PR study (de Bussy & Wolf, 2009), these consultants could easily have selected the “not at all” or “seldom” tickbox when asked about their use of new media, without further consideration. However, a different picture emerged in this study when a deeper exploration was conducted during the interviews. This arguably demonstrates the potential of qualitative research. Despite initially rating themselves as no expert in the field, most of the registered consultants had a designated new media staff member, all had conducted research into the field and were (at times cautiously) looking into where new media could be adopted for their clients.
REASONS FOR NOT ENGAGING IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Several different reasons were cited for not actively engaging with new media. The main themes generated were a lack of control over social media, tools not being appropriate for clients, associated resource commitments and current lack of expertise. Outsourcing was seen as an alternative.

One consultant specifically stated age-related reasons for his reluctance:

“Well you’ll get a slightly different view from me than most, A) because I am older and B), because the social media and the web and whatnot is something I don’t really get involved in. XXX, my sort of PA, who has gone off to have a baby was great with all that sort of stuff. I don’t want to get too involved in the web based stuff – because I am of that vintage.”

Those consultants who were not using new media either felt the tools were not appropriate or that their clients were reluctant:

“A lot of our clients are very reticent to use new media in anything but a cautious way because there is no capacity to control it. So the major mining companies will have a website but they are reluctant to adopt new media. Our earnest clients will not touch that area at all.”

Along similar lines, one registered consultant explained: “We explored it a lot...we thought about it a lot...resourcing...risks... And for the kinds of clients we have we don’t think that it is necessarily the right kind of medium.” And from yet another interviewee: “We don’t – we fall into the sort of category that are not experts in those techniques, because our clients have little or no need for it and we have discussed it with all of them. Some of them are very backward in terms of what they want to do.”

ASSOCIATED RISK

The concept of “risk” or lack of control was a theme that emerged strongly, being mentioned by more than half of the consultants. As one active professional user of blogs and Twitter explained: “I think it’s just being really careful. You don’t have a hell of a lot of control over social media. I think you just need to analyse whether or not it suits the client.” Another consultant made a similar point, emphasising the steep learning curve associated with new media:

“It’s a different discipline, different rules apply and it is still evolving. Protocols and governance around new media is a whole subject on its own – people are just coming to grips with it now. So as a whole it is significant. It’s still evolving – protocols and governance. It’s a whole other dimension to reputation management in an environment that is essentially chaotic and entirely free of any barriers to entry.”

Both authors were somewhat surprised to hear that clients were not generally perceived as pushing for new media integration in their public relations programs. Instead, it seemed that clients trusted their consultants to recommend appropriate tools and channels, thereby confirming that registered consultants appeared to have a solid reputation and
strong relationships with their clients.

Training and resources were the final, major consideration that reportedly prevented consultants from becoming involved with new media. Not only was there the perceived need for consultants to gain new skills, but participants furthermore recognised the ongoing time and resource commitment that new media engagement would require. As one interviewee explained:

“[...] I also believe if you go into that new media space you have got to be willing to commit to it long term and you need to re-source it... the resourcing is a huge commitment for clients.”

This consultant later made the interesting observation that you can send out a media release to a journalists and see if “it works”, but “…you can’t set up a blog or Twitter account and then ’bail out’ or leave it sitting empty”.

The authors felt that this following quote summarises participants’ reluctance to invest in new media within a professional context:

“It’s quick, it’s immediate, it’s time consuming – it’s ferocious in terms of time resource. It is difficult to monitor or control. It’s raising a whole new market place - the implications for our industry and for our line of work are very significant just because it needs to be part of the mix.”

These comments echo the conclusions by Kent (2008) that public relations professionals should not get “trampled by the blogging stampede” until scholars, researchers, and especially professionals actually understand them better. Although specifically focused on blogs, Kent’s comments could apply to the entire suite of new media tools, when he states that it will only be “useful to an organisation if it has someone to maintain it, someone trained in effective dialogic communication, and someone who has the trust of individuals and publics” (p. 39).

**REASONS TO ENGAGE IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

**STAYING AHEAD**

The reasons for caution and research were detailed and underlined by all consultancies that participated in this study. However, two of the seven consultancies also talked about their efforts to “stay ahead” - or at least keep up - with trends:

“It’s part of the mix – it’s part of launches – or just day to day business – we’ve got to think how do you make it a little bit different - we’re quite proactive in recommending it and just opening their eyes. I see it as our obligation – you go to the doctor, you want to come out with a cure. We constantly give ideas of how do we stay ahead of the game.”

This consultant had a dedicated online division and its principal felt that the online area of the business would grow and could even take over the traditional area of communications. The consultant even mentioned exploring the creation of applications - “apps” - for clients to be used on iPhones and iPads. Another consultant talked about simply having to “keep up”, rather than stay ahead: “I think that as a PR firm we’re starting to really real-
ise how much it’s going to be of value to clients,” she explained.

**EXTENSION OF THE TOOLKIT**

A serious point made by at least two of the consultants – both with more than 20 years’ experience in the consulting business – was the fact that new media tools are merely an extension of their toolkit but did not replace strategy. “I think that people feel that they have to have this stuff because it’s cool but fundamentally you have to ask: how does this serve strategy and if it doesn’t what is the point of it?” They stressed that the arrival of new media had not changed the essential rules of communication:

“I can’t stress enough: It is a tool. It is not about strategy development. It is something that we use to promote strategy – it is the strategy that achieves the business outcome – not whether it’s Twitter or a Facebook or a magazine. It is one of the tools. I am not overawed by new media. I understand enough to get on with my job.”

**NOT FOR THE OFFICE JUNIOR?**

The apparent dichotomy of roles for public relations practitioners between manager vs. technician found in the public relations literature (see Dozier, 1992) needs reappraisal, given the impact of new media. Indeed, the authors noticed contrasting viewpoints regarding the required seniority of internal new media experts. Most RCG representatives reported that they had dedicated in-house experts, while some were more inclined to outsource to specialist agencies. One consultant described the designated new media expert in the office as “my PA”. Two others reported nominating the most junior member of the team as “new media specialist”, based on the perceived expertise associated with Generation Y. This comment was typical:

“In my office I do have a person who manages all technology. If I want to know something I just go to him and ask him “what’s cooking”. I don’t really even talk about new media – the technology specific things I don’t talk about, so much, but I would I expect him to come into our meetings and be able to give advice.”

However, others felt the new media role should not be allocated to the least experienced member of the team:

“[There are]...all sorts of examples where it has gone horribly wrong. And I think this is something that corporates and others in governments need to come to grips with. It’s not a junior job necessarily. You can’t just give it to the PA and say: go and play with Twitter. It’s a real and genuine communication tool and it needs to be treated with the respect. And this is not to say that PAs aren’t worthy of respect. What I am saying is that it’s a communications job. It’s not a ‘by the way, in between taking the minutes, doing the filing and running the office, can you organise the Twitter?’”

**THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF MONITORING**

Monitoring both traditional sources and “new media” was seen as a vital role for
some consultancies, in order to add benefit for their clients. As one participant explained:

“We monitor the electronic media – the web – for any number of clients because if an issue is maturing it will mature there before anywhere else and even then you might not actually hear about it. So it’s a little bit like the old grapevine. So participate on the web – or at least know what people are saying on it. If your client was developing assets up north you might want to be monitoring for growth impacts – greens and talk of heritage rock art - so you could follow conversations.”

Another consultant described the importance of intelligence gathering for clients, and cited the military as doing it well:

“On a daily basis we are keeping track of clients and what is happening in their world and what they need from us in order to communicate effectively. So we might look at new opportunities in order to connect them to their target markets…I guess that’s market intelligence, who is doing what – if you don’t have your finger on the pulse of that who’s doing what…who are the main movers and shakers …Because I believe public relations is all about connections.”

Twitter was not immediately mentioned by most consultants as a crucial area for monitoring, despite about half of the consultants reportedly using Twitter to distribute messages to journalists and other stakeholders. Three consultants, even one whose principal work was reportedly in crisis communications, reportedly completely ignored microblogging sites as part of their environmental scanning efforts.

**Physician, heal thyself**

While one of the RCG consultancies was recognised by their peers as “being an expert in the field”, others found that using new media to promote themselves (for example blogs, e-newsletters or Twitter) was something they had not enough time for, particularly as they felt that clients’ needs should come first. One consultancy had only relatively recently launched their own company website and explained why:

“We never got round to it…in the meantime we are doing a lot of writing and developing websites for our clients…but it’s a little bit of a ‘doctor heal thyself’ …we’ve been very lucky not to have to look for work, so we didn't need it from a marketing point of view…but then it got embarrassing…even WE know we should update…What should you do - spend time on work for your client or spend time on updating your website?”

The same sentiment was expressed by another consultant:

“Generally we are so busy we just don’t have time to think about marketing ourselves. It’s like electricians – in the home of an electrician you will get electrocuted … and the same it is with us—we do our own PR appallingly, because we are so busy, so focused on everybody else.”
Conclusion

Over half a decade ago, Galloway (2005) referred to corporate websites, chat-rooms, email response facilities and electronic release distribution as “standard aspects” of public relations. However, five years later, Australian consultants appear to still have their doubt about the appropriateness of various new media tools for their clients, and indeed for themselves. The ‘new’ in new media might imply something novel and exciting, but as we are moving on from Web2.0 to Web3.0 (or the latest buzzword, the semantic web), it becomes obvious that new media is simply an additional tool in the PR toolbox or in the words of one of our participants, “part of the buffet, part of the suite of tools”. Overall, with one exception, WA-based registered consultants appeared to be rather cautious, watching from the sidelines. However, on reflection the authors are wondering if participants may have been playing down the thought, energy and resources that have already gone into the use of new media.

Risk was the strongest deterrent that emerged during this study, both for clients, who may not be initiating the move into the new media environment, as well as for consultants, who felt their expertise was too limited. However, most RCG members expressed that it was their responsibility as consultant to be able to provide advice on the appropriate use of different tools, which in turn means they are under pressure to accumulate the necessary new media expertise. It is important to keep the restricted scope of the WA industry and consequently consultancy market in mind, with mining companies being arguably more reluctant to experiment with social media channels, than their FMCG counterpart. However, the lack of recognition of new media as scanning tool in some cases left both researchers surprised.

Arguably, the warning not to be to be too bedazzled by technology – “new voodoo technologies” as one consultant described them - is something all practitioners (and academics) should heed. This comment sums up the sentiment:

“To be frank with you – and I know I probably sound like a silly old fart – but I have seen all of this stuff again and again so you come to a point...It’s the most dramatic new tool, let’s face it, in the last 50 years or so but it is a communication tool none the less. That’s all it is. And in order to function across that media you need to be a good technician. But it’s no replacement for strategy – there is no such thing as a new media strategy. It’s a collection of tactics to support a strategy.”

Many of the consultants’ comments echo the reasons for lack of adoption found in the de Bussy and Wolf’s (2009) study. However, all consultants in this study (with possibly one exception) were doing more training and had given serious thought to the implications of new media on their businesses and their clients’ organisations. New media are certainly creating new opportunities – and new challenges - for all concerned.

This study has contributed to the research field in a number of ways. It would appear to be the first in-depth study into the adoption of new media in Australia. Until now, studies have largely focused on the US and many have been technical how-tos rather than scholarly research (Kent, 2008). The study provides a rich and thick description of consultants’ current concerns and struggles related to grappling with the new media revolution.
Limitations and future studies

Clearly this study has limitations, given that it is focused on registered consultancies in Western Australia, a reasonably small sample of seven interviewees. However, qualitative researchers are interested in deep exploration in order to provide rich, holistic descriptions. Small samples are therefore more usual – investigated in-depth and over time (Creswell, 2003; Daymon & Holloway, 2002). The personal interpretation brought to qualitative data cannot be escaped (Creswell, 2003). This risk of bias, whilst acknowledged, was lessened, with both researchers independently coding data for themes.

It is important to note that this study relied on responses from senior consultants/owners, with their own business interests at heart, who therefore might not have been entirely honest and transparent about their concerns or plans.

The research team is planning to expand on current findings by interviewing non RCG members, including the State’s biggest consultancy (which is registered in NSW, but not in WA).

For future studies, it would be interesting to compare findings with other Australian states, investigating potential differences, due to the West Australian focus on resources and infrastructure clients and limited fast-moving-consumer-goods accounts. A cross-cultural study would also be of value, looking at registered consultants in other countries. We believe a comparison between West Australian and Singaporean practitioners’ attitudes towards - and adaptation of - new technologies would be particularly insightful, due to their relative geographic proximity.

The authors recommend repeating these interviews over time to document any shift in attitude towards new media.

REFERENCES


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