

Communicating Change and Changing Communication in the 21st Century: A Critical Perspective

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Abstract

When the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said that the world is in constant flux and that opposites are intrinsically linked, he was not understood. In our current world, however, we can confidently say that change is one of the few constants and that change is often driven by the resolution of opposites in what has become known as the dialectic. We have witnessed dramatic changes since the World Wide Web became user-friendly – or less user-unfriendly. The speed of communication technology is helping us to avoid stepping into the same river twice. Our economic values have changed to include digital assets as property. Media consumers are now producer-users or ‘producers’. Movies have moved from Hollywood to Bollywood and from Bollywood to Nollywood. We have witnessed news priorities shift from rich, so-called elite nations to poor, non-western nations as we have moved from CNN to Al Jazeera and seen how non-western news sources have reshaped global thinking. We have witnessed and are still witnessing the use of social media, enhancing people power in the Gulf region, for example. We have become more circumspect in defining our geopolitical and spatiotemporal spaces, especially as new political landscapes and movements develop. How have media and communication institutions been communicating these changes, and how are these changes affecting media and communication in the 21st century? What other changes are we likely to witness in the near future?

There has been a dramatic growth in social media adoption, changing the political power bases and democratic arenas of many nations. This growth in social media use and Web 2.0 platforms has resulted in a dramatic growth in research into changing media and communication practices. In 2012, Nokia lost its lead in mobile phone technology to Samsung and, at the same time, iPhone and iPad lost their dominant market share to competing tablet technologies on the android platform. Many of these platforms have not just developed as media platforms but have also enabled the growth and establishment of other interactive media. Wiki has not only become a valuable reference, but also has become an enabler for many students and academics doing media research.

Twitter, launched in 2006, now has more than 190 million users while Facebook did not just take over MySpace but has become the world’s largest social media network, with more than 600 million users in less than eight years. The most important changes are not just the growth of these media technologies, but the ways they have affected the social and political lives of people around the world, and redefined the role of media in society. We have witnessed changes in media practices as a result of the Global Financial Crises (GFC). We have seen citizen and investigative journalism redefined through the operations of Wikileaks. We have seen nations rise up against dictatorial regimes in the Arab Spring. We have seen ethics thrown to the dogs, and the tail wagging the dog, in the phone-hacking scandals of *News of the World*.

The public-private dichotomy

Following the death of Princess Diana in the Pont de l'Alma Tunnel, after the paparazzi pursued her car, which was driven by an intoxicated chauffeur, we have now seen the deadly prank call from Australia to the nurses looking after her daughter-in-law in a London hospital. Before jumping to conclusions and apportioning blame, we need to understand the contextual framework of the new media landscape in which the radio hosts are operating and how this context affects human empathy and sense of privacy. According to Swigger (2012), individuals who spend more time self-publicising on the internet seem to value freedom of expression more – and value the right to privacy less – than people who use the internet and social media less.

In this case, we could infer that social media has replaced paparazzi media, at least for the part of the generation that Marc Prensky (2001) calls digital natives – speakers of the digital language of computers, video games and the internet. Mel Greig and Michael Christian, the 2Day FM presenters who made the prank call to the King Edward VII Hospital in London pretending to be the Queen, did so because either they have no respect for the privacy of Prince William and his wife Kate as individuals, or the incident was enabled by the way social media has further desensitised us to invasions of privacy. While invasions of privacy and prank calls have always been part of journalism, albeit a controversial part, the changed media landscape is confusing the public-private dichotomy, with implications for the legal and ethical training of media practitioners. What do we mean by 'private' in the era of YouTube and social media? The woman who posts her pregnancy test result on YouTube or shares her family's break-up on Facebook, while she has the right to do so, is creating an expectation in the minds of some of her audience that matters once assumed to be private are now less so.

According to Swigger (2012), the younger generation who constitute the majority of social media users are living their lives more publicly. This ideological repositioning of private spaces into the public domain has significant implications for the legislative protection of individual privacy and private spaces. While the tragic consequences of the prank phone call may provoke disdain and disgust, they also emphasise the need to critically assess the effects of social networks on behaviour. The more we live our lives in the public domain, the more our moral codes and sense of privacy are challenged. Swigger argues social media is changing the social norms of those who constantly use it. Young adults live in a world in which the Internet has always existed, and social media sites have been a part of their intellectual and social development. Therefore, they have come of age at a time when social interaction requires sharing a great deal of their thoughts and life experiences online. Sharing of personal matters in public spaces becomes normalised behaviour over time. The fact that some people are still living in a sheltered private world may come as a shock to a generation of publicly-oriented citizens. One question to be explored, therefore, will be: How does this social interaction affect the understanding of privacy and the discourse surrounding the invasion of privacy?

Is media practice keeping pace?

These changes have created a need for media practitioners to examine the directions current practice is leading. While some of these changes are part of everyday life, some are media specific and the media needs to respond to them. For example, medical technology has helped to extend human lifespan; we have reached what is now referred to as the age of compression of morbidity, meaning we are living longer and healthier lives. Unfortunately, media

representations still tend to focus on younger people and the older demographics are under-represented. According to a 2012 UN population projection, the number of people over the age of 60 is expected to reach one billion by 2020 and almost two billion by 2050, or 22 per cent of the world's population (Bloom et al 2010: 233–244). A report by Pew Research shows a dramatic jump in the number of seniors aged 65 years and over who are now online (Zickuhr, 2012). According to the report, between August 2008 and April 2012, there was a significant increase from 38% to 53% seniors over 65 years who use the internet in the US. While this uptake is not universal, it does show a significant change in media consumption and indicates a need for media organisations to refocus and to avoid representing older people as merely the dying generation. This need is not limited to electronic media. For example, in October 2012, a new theatre group was launched at the University of Sheffield to address the needs of over 50s. This theatrical experiment aims to change the current under-representation of older generations in the media and entertainment world, in pursuit of a younger techno-savvy market (Star, 2012). The effects the growing ageing population, and shrinking youth population as a proportion of the whole, are having on media practice and profitability are other issues that need to be addressed.

Similarly, many media educators erroneously assume that either all young people are digital natives or that those who are technologically savvy understand the full implications of their digital interaction and media consumption. The changing media landscape opens up new educational challenges and opportunities for critical thinking. Hirst and Treadwell (2011: 446) found that:

while the vast majority of students have some engagement with social media, particularly in social networking, and are aware that it can be a powerful tool for journalists, they are still not entirely comfortable with its techniques and they are not experimenting with social media as a production platform as much as we first thought.

The implication is that, while we are communicating change, we also need to change the way we communicate. Hirst and Treadwell also acknowledge the job market is changing in favour of multi-skilled and social media-savvy young journalism graduates, and this market is demanding more creative thinking as journalists incorporate new publishing models into their practice.

Mainstream media and global finance

Changes in the structure of the global financial market are affecting media organisations, creating flow-on effects that extend to the education of new media practitioners and their vocational expectations. Recently, Fairfax Media Ltd overhauled its operation when one of its biggest shareholders, Gina Rinehart, demanded a better return on investments. The overhaul led to the shedding of more than 1900 positions in order to provide a more versatile digital content platform. In October 2012, the Nine Entertainment Network was on the verge of receivership as it was unable to meet its debt obligations of about \$2.3 billion to US hedge funds Apollo and Oaktree, and a further \$1 billion to investment bank Goldman Sachs. In a last-minute arrangement that saved the organisation, hedge funds gained control of 95.5 per cent of Nine Entertainment while the other lenders, including Goldman Sachs, took the remaining 4.5 per cent (Trute, 2012). Nine Entertainment Co. is now majority owned by CVC Asia Pacific Limited. Similarly, Ten Network Holdings Limited is going through a series of financial crises, leading to a drop of more than a quarter of its share market value (Chong, 2012).

Financial crises such as these reflect the changing nature of media audiences and changes in their preferred sources of news, comment and information. According to a Pew Research Centre survey (2010), the internet is now the third most popular source of news, behind local and national television news and ahead of national print newspapers, local print newspapers and radio (Purcell, 2010). According to that survey, the overwhelming majority of Americans (92%) use multiple platforms to get their daily news. The implication of this change is that media organisations that do not keep up with the changes will suffer audience losses.

Hirst and Treadwell ask how, in the midst of these changes, do we prepare the next generation of media practitioners and what skills do they need to have. In answering, they reference Peg Finucane, who believes that, even though there is no blueprint for

the retooling of journalism education; however, there is some agreement that, outside the technical craft of writing, flexibility is the key to survival in the newsroom of today and the near future (Finucane, 2006: 447).

The next question needing to be asked is, how prepared are media teachers to deal with such a shift in curricula? According to Lynch (2007):

when our students challenge our authority or fact check our proclamations during class, we need to stop scrambling for classroom management techniques and start addressing the widening gap between their assumptions about knowledge production and our own.

Our expectations of students do not necessarily relate to their outputs. According to Prensky, children raised in the digital age are thinking differently. They are developing hypertextual thought processes rather than the linear thought processes we normally use in designing courses and assessing students or expecting them to perform. Their 'brains have been developed through game and Web-surfing processes on the computer' (Prensky, 2001: 10). As Lynch (2007) rightly observed, these millennial children understand that the days of the old ways of doing things are numbered. We therefore need to change our communication patterns as well as communicate such changes as educators and professionals.

Politically, the internet is mirroring rather than transforming society. There is as much social inequality online as there is offline (Witte and Mannon, 2010). While this is true statistically, there are other, more complex, internal divides within rich countries and poor countries. Social inequality is not merely geopolitical stratification. The US, the world's most advanced economy, for example, has the widest gap between rich and poor. This inequality drives a need for participation, especially among disenfranchised people, whose weapon of choice is becoming the new media platforms, not least because the traditional media have become dominated by the wealthy. According to Howard and Hussain (2011), one of the most consistent narratives from civil society leaders in the Persian Gulf region has been that the Internet, mobile phones, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter made a decisive difference in their campaigns. The power of social networks lies in their ability to change from mediation and comment to user generation of information and content (Han, 2011).

New media for a new democracy

As they enable people to generate and publish stories and commentary, to ignore or to navigate mazes of ideologically constructed information, and to circumvent bureaucracy, social networks

have become a powerful tool for democratic participation (Castells 2009, Benkler 2006). Mark Pack (2010) notes the effective use of social media by the Obama campaign in 2007–8. Similar participation took place in Australia during Kevin Rudd's 2007 campaign and David Cameron's in Britain in 2010. The 2011 Nigerian federal election, which many claimed as one of the nation's fairest, illustrates the potential for social media to confer substantial utility on the democratic processes while at the same time producing the potential for abuse. The success of the Nigerian election has been attributed to the use of social media by young people mobilising their peers to vote. While many hailed these youth empowerment strategies as democratic, others labelled them elitist. Mochizuki (2009: 220) noted that 'youth movements used to be regarded positively in Nigeria in spite of their elitist character' because the country's independence was fought and won by an elite who represented the interest of the people. Elitism was once regarded as a democratic participation motivator, especially among communities where educated young people used their elite status for political activism. Today, however, civic elitism has been polarised by many other socio-economic variables that have little or no democratic objectives. It is also worth noting that disenfranchising ideologies are also enabled by new media and communication tools. We could argue that while old technologies were controlled by the rich and powerful to the exclusion of the poor, new media technologies have enabled some, limited, access for those previously denied a voice. The age of total media exclusivity has morphed into a more participatory environment. According to Abimbola (2011), despite the fact that the Nigerian social media activists were regarded as a middle class, internet-savvy, Blackberry-toting, mobile elite, who do not represent the vast majority of the uneducated, one must acknowledge a movement away from a period of total ignorance to one of awareness and participation – albeit partial and limited.

Changes in today's media landscape are prompting adjustments in media and communication policy and regulation but the extent, nature and adequacy of the adjustments made so far require scrutiny. For example, while public service media is to be commended for its unifying and educational role in the old media environment, we need to establish how much of that role is still relevant, and how appropriately the public service media is adjusting to the changing media landscape. Having many channels to choose from may not automatically imply embracing change and meeting the changing consumption demands of today's and tomorrow's markets.

It is time to rethink the media's model of operation and to redefine the new public in light of new media platforms that enable more participatory democracy from individuals rather than from the public sphere. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's definition (UNESCO, updated 2011), public service broadcasting is 'broadcasting made, financed and controlled by the public, for the public... neither commercial nor state-owned, free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces'. On the other hand, Jürgen Habermas (1991) in his 1962 *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, sees an ideal public sphere as a system where power devolves from private enterprise and governments to the people. It is the empowerment of the public through collective thinking. Similarly, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in its establishment Charter (1983) was tasked with contributing to a sense of national identity through information, entertainment and the reflection of the cultural diversity of Australia, while the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) in 1991 was charged with, among other things, recognising the many languages in Australia and addressing the programming needs of the speakers of those languages. These generic public broadcasting objectives tend to guide the operations of public service organisations in other countries, such as

Canada, South Africa and Japan. The relevance of the above ideals in today's changing media platform needs to be questioned. As we move into the world of Web 2.0 with its interactive and produser-enabled platform, questions need to be asked about the relevance of centralised media platforms that are expensive and whose appeal to disparate audiences is debatable. In Australia, we could ask how much of the ABC's charter is relevant today as our culture changes from British to non-British and becomes increasingly multicultural.

Social media played a very significant role in the Arab Spring, despite years of a state-run political media agenda, confirming the role of the modern media in democratic participation and communication. When we place this upsurge of social media use, or what Castells (2009) calls 'mass self-communication', alongside the dwindling ratings of public service media, the question of justifying the latter's expense becomes more relevant.

These issues become even more relevant when economic data also demonstrate that public services are more efficiently run by private organisations than governments, especially when commercial competitors are in the same market. According to Mendel (2011: 11), in certain countries, the distinction between public service and commercial broadcasting has become increasingly blurred, leading to what is called 'program convergence', sometimes at the expense of 'quality of the programs'. In view of these challenges, it may be necessary to use Castells's concept of mass self-communication to redefine 'public' and suggest alternative models to justify public service media in a fragmented produser media environment. These changes will continue into the future, making it imperative that, in *Communicating Change and Changing Communication in the 21st Century*, we explore some of the implications for our society.

Themed conference papers

In this collection of research papers, the contributors have explored these issues from different perspectives. In *The rhetoric of internet regulation: How language is framed in a changing media landscape*, Sebastian Dixon argues that the digitisation of the media presents unprecedented challenges for developing an effective and dynamic regulatory framework as governments formulate and put into practice new regulatory policies and structures in this changed context. How governments and particular politicians communicate to the public about policies (and how the media then interprets and responds to these) makes a difference to the discursive field and meaning-making potential of the public sphere around specific issues and policy initiatives.

Steve Maras, on the other hand, builds on David Nolan's work on the norm of objectivity, drawing on the 1971 US television documentary program, *The Selling of the Pentagon*, to explore issues relating to broadcast regulation and objectivity. Considering the operationalisation of objectivity in a regulatory context, he argues that legislators have adopted a super-editorial position on the work of broadcast journalists and asks for a closer analysis of the discursive and cultural conditions surrounding the objectivity norm. This analysis reinforces Nolan's view that, while objectivity operates as a 'regime of truth', this regime is nevertheless negotiated in the interplay of political, regulatory and practitioner understandings of practice.

David Paterno in his paper titled *Understanding Media in Context*, argues that in order to understand any one medium, analysts must also take stock of the relationships and conflicts held with other media encountered within a research site. Moreover, it is argued that communication must be accounted for with reference to the historically contextualised social behaviours encountered or expected there.

Using data from a doctoral research project that examined the creative practices of print journalists in Australia, Janet Fulton demonstrates how journalists interact with their audience throughout the work process, from story generation to research, writing, publishing and feedback, arguing that, although the audiences have always been one of the structures that journalists interact with in their creative process, changes occurring in journalism today have led to the audience becoming more important in a journalist's creative process, particularly with newer work practices such as social media and online writing and tools such as search engine optimisation.

Advertisers also come under scrutiny when images are perceived to have negative influence on society, especially when such representation creates changes that negate social decorum or create psychological problems such as body image. David Waller uses the magazine advertisement of *CoverGirl* which caused some controversy with UK and US regulators, and led to its voluntary withdrawal, to explore the implications for cosmetic advertising.

In *Communicating Change and Changing Communication*, many authors tackle the issues from different perspectives: Elspeth Tilley uses Bourdieu's field theory as an interpretive lens to examine public relations practitioners' testimony about ethical practice in their day-to-day working lives. Tara Ross argues for a different way of looking at Pasifika news media that recognises identity as a dominant force in their construction and practice. Through analysis of producers' discursive practices and the texts of two major Pasifika media in Aotearoa New Zealand – *Tagata Pasifika* and *Spasifik* – this paper finds that identity work lies at the heart of what Pasifika news media do.

Changes in shopping experience are explored by Joanna Henryks, who reports the findings of research exploring regular shoppers at farmers' markets in Canberra, Australia, as well as participants living in Armidale, a town in regional Australia. The research explores what and how we define shopping and shopping experience in relation to farmers markets, how they are advertised as well as the growth of farmers market from a mere handful to more than 130 in just two decades. Phillip McIntyre uses various media and communication theories to ask how messages are created and how the application of these media and communication theories implicate changes and thinking about Communication theory.

Bei Guo argues that, as certain kinds of democracy are realised, media content is affected and that market-oriented media can result in undemocratic practices, such as reduced media coverage of some sections of society, particularly subculture groups. These groups include migrant workers, who represent economically socially excluded groups, and homosexual people, who are unacceptable as far as mainstream culture is concerned. These two groups account for a large number of people in China. She uses content analysis from media websites as well as field study of the subculture groups' off-line activities to present a critical perspective of digital media, which these groups use in their struggle for public space, and the profound influence this has in the theorisation of media development in China.

Luke Strongman explores communicative practice in conflict resolution in its unitary and pluralistic forms, and highlights ways in which interpersonal conflict negotiation and resolution may be recapitulated in organisational or international experiences of conflict resolution. Kate Holland examines the concept of 'biocommunicability' as a lens through which to make sense of journalists' talk about their health reporting practices. The research focuses on journalists' experiences of reporting the 2009 swine flu pandemic, with reference to how they dealt with

conflicting viewpoints, how they perceived their roles in relation to official public health messages and how they negotiated the flow of information. These are only a few of the many contributors to these proceedings who have investigated how we are changing communication and communicating change in the 21st century and beyond.

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