Leveraging trust: The politics of accountability and risk taking at the ABC

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Abstract

Long a key point of difference for public broadcasters, trustworthiness has assumed new significance in a global media marketplace characterised by conglomeration, corporate and government spin and non-professional citizen and social networking media. As ABC television, one of Australia’s most trusted institutions, renegotiates its relationship with the audience via multi-platform delivery, it seems pertinent to explore how these changes might affect public trust, which is integral to the ABC’s role in providing crucial resources for citizenship. This new phase as a cross platform provider presents both opportunity and conundrum for ABC management - how to leverage trust as an asset without damaging it? Over the past decade, while continuing to prioritise news and current affairs, the ABC has developed an innovative online presence, which corporate polling indicates has sustained its high level of audience trust. Drawing on the emerging field of trust studies, this paper will discuss the social value of trust, how recent changes are affecting it and what this means for the ABC as a provider of resources for citizenship.

Keywords

Trust, public service broadcasting, citizenship, cross-platform media

Introduction

Surveys of public attitudes around the world indicate that “generalised trust” in other people has been in decline for decades. Public trust in social institutions is worse with survey results
invariably ranking politicians and journalists towards the bottom. Although a certain level of skepticism of officialdom and those in power might be deemed as “healthy”, many social commentators have linked the parlous state of public trust to the erosion of citizenship and democracy, with cynicism viewed as likely to induce apathy and disengagement from civic life. While any measurement of trust raises the credibility issues associated with survey research and opinion polling, that trust is viewed as an indicator of benevolence means it generally tends to be seen as a good thing. However, as often noted while trust is associated with honesty, it is not the prerogative of the good: criminals are just as likely to trust one another as those of law-abiding disposition. In the media public trust is something that offers an important point of difference for public service broadcasters (PSBs), because the public generally accord high scores for trustworthiness “to institutions perceived to be independent and existing mainly for the good of others, rather than for the interests of the organization itself” (Bakir & Barlow, 2007, p. 4). Traditionally this trustworthy status has incurred the paradoxical obligation of preparedness to risk trust by representing diverse viewpoints and providing commentary free from the influence of government or commercial vested interests. This has often resulted in public broadcasters being accused of leftwing bias since it has led to coverage of dissenting views unavailable elsewhere.

The characteristics of trustworthiness identified by Bakir and Barlow, are reflected in the charters of PSBs - independence from vested interests, delivering news that is fair and impartial, reflecting national culture and identity, serving diversity through representing minority voices, and addressing audiences and interests not served by commercial media – and indicate why public media are deemed to hold a trust advantage. As Biltereyst observes, there is a close connection between trust and traditional PSB ethos and values - impartiality, independence, quality, diversity, integrity, truth and accuracy (Biltereyst, 2004, 342). This is signaled by the high trust in public broadcasters in surveys of public attitudes around the world (Inglis 2000, p. 588; Ferrell Lowe & Bardoel 2007, pp. 20-21). The focus of interest in this paper is how public service broadcasters’ transition to public service media will impact on their trusted status and thus on the system’s capacity to provide resources for citizenship. This will be explored through the analysis of various recent developments at the ABC with reference to existing commentary, policy documents and interviews with ABC managers.

A crisis of trust
Reflected in polls and surveys taken of public attitudes over the last few decades (Bakir & Barlow, 2007, p. 3) the decline in public trust is commonly described as a crisis, generally with reference to trust in public institutions (Bakir & Barlow, 2007; Beck et al 1994; Gore,
2007; Keen, 2007; O’Neill, 2002; Paxman 2007; Putnam 2000; Thompson, 2007, 2008) and has been attributed to various factors: recurring reports of official mismanagement and corporate fraud; the reframing of social progress in contemporary technological societies in terms of risk management, foregrounding inherent risks – such as those to health, the environment, national security and the economy (Beck et al, 1994); reduced social capital as a result of declining social networking (Putnam, 2000); and a new drive for quantifiable accountability that has had the side-effect of inducing a culture of suspicion and distrust (O’Neill, 2002c, pp. 4-5).

In their book, *The Age of Suspicion*, Vian Bakir and David Barlow identify two broad debates about trust in the media: the role of the media in relation to the process and practice of citizenship; and the extent to which the media enable the public to “talk back” to power, thus making the state accountable. They also observe, it is only when citizens are empowered through the debates of a “free” media that they can make the state accountable (Bakir & Barlow, 2007, p. 19). Certainly trusted media are widely viewed as an important prerequisite for an informed citizenry and a democratic society (Archer, 2007; Splichal 2006; Murdock, 2007; Beecher, 2008).

The proliferation of online media has contributed to the crisis of trust and plays a part in both debates identified by Bakir and Barlow – citizenship and holding government accountable. As regards the first – citizenship – by increasing competition for audience/market share, online media is fuelling conglomeration amongst commercial players as existing businesses leverage their “first mover” advantage through mergers and acquisitions, raising the bar for new entrants. Conglomeration in media ownership concentrates the editorial influence of vested interests, eroding the diversity of voices heard across the news media. These developments underline two specific concerns: the dearth of serious political journalism as news media providers become more entertainment-focused to cope with a fragmenting audience/readership and dwindling advertising share, and the demise of investigative journalism, a resource hungry enterprise once valued for the status it imbued, but which is no longer cost efficient (Schlesinger, 2006; Turner, 2005, pp. 156-161; Hirst & Harrison, 2007, pp 238-59; 334-355). There is also considerable evidence to indicate that reductions in newsroom budgets and increased workloads have made editors more dependent on public relations copy, and made journalists more vulnerable to manipulation by government and corporate communications staff (Louw, 2005). Together with shifts in audience habits, these changes are being widely interpreted as signaling the decline of the professional news media (Greenslade, 2008).
On the other hand, web logs, or blogs, referred to *en masse* as the blogosphere, along with online citizen media, which celebrate unmediated freedom of opinion and the personalizing of public issues, are being heralded as having a key role in the future of journalism. One forecast from *The Guardian*'s Roy Greenslade, envisages stripped-down hybrid news organizations, where the reportage of amateur “citizen” journalists is edited by professionals (ABC, 2008a). While offering democratizing advantages alongside traditional hard news, helping to keep professionals in touch and honest, citizen media is problematic as a dominant news model. During London’s July 2007 Underground bombing, mobile phone reports from citizen-journalists on the spot proved unreliable. Whether due to lack of observational skills, attention seeking or an intention to deceive, the non-accountability of citizen media reflects the relative reliability of work by trained journalists with reputations and livelihoods to lose (Hirst & Harrison, 2007, p. 258). Thus the high volume of news services online may well enhance rather than challenge the perceived public value of the news services of PSBs.

**Defining trust**

Trust is a slippery concept to define; Bakir and Barlow describe it as a “complex phenomenon, compromising many subtleties” with three features at its core – rationality, faith and confidence. The association with rationality originates in Enlightenment thinking, with trust being an integral part of the recognized benefits (individualist and collective) of a logical social order. Freeing the individual from the paralysis of indecision, trust as faith comes into play when fair judgements or assessments are inhibited by circumstance. The association of trust with confidence is less clear, requiring differentiation from hope. Only those who have considered all alternatives trust with confidence - rather than hope (Bakir & Barlow, 2007, p 10; p. 110).

Exploring the value of trust, Bakir and Barlow ask the question, “What does trust do?” and identify five functions: serving as social glue; generating social capital and thereby lubricating economic and political cooperation; managing social complexity - facilitating effective communication and administration in technologically and culturally complex societies; acting as a solution for risk; and serving as a prerequisite for forming self identity. The idea of trust as social glue has been endorsed by sociologists from Simmel (1908) to Durkheim (1964), the central argument being that without trust people would be unable to arrive at the shared goals that form the basis of any community (Bakir & Barlow, 2007, p. 12).

The second function, social capital, which refers to community networks and their role in building “civic engagement”, both draws on and builds trust. Social capital is viewed as
strengthening shared ethical values that reduce the need for legal regulation and simplify bureaucracy, lubricating cooperation, bringing tangible economic and social benefits. Social capital is attributed with political significance at both macro institutional and micro community levels: when it is high, “citizens express confidence and trust not only in each other but also in public institutions, which in turn encourages citizens to work to improve the state’s democratic accountability” (Bakir & Barlow, 2007, p. 11; p. 23). Putnam identifies “generalised reciprocity” as the most valuable benefit of social capital:

A society characterised by generalized reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society, for the same reason that money is more efficient than barter. If we don’t have to balance every exchange instantly, we can get a lot more accomplished.

Trustworthiness lubricates social life. Frequent interaction among a diverse set of people tends to produce a norm of generalised reciprocity. Civic engagement and social capital entail mutual obligation and responsibility for action. (Putnam, 2000, p. 21)

Describing trust as contributing “complexity reduction”, Luhmann (1979) allocated an important function to trust in contemporary, multicultural, technocratic society, disrupting assumptions that its social value was defunct, which had cast it as “an obsolete resource typical of traditional society” (cited in Bakir and Barlow, 2007, p. 13). Social trust, as opposed to the impersonal, contractual, fiduciary trust of trusteeship, plays an important part in democratic systems of government with the electorate required to imbue trust in those it elects, a process that enables “greater exploitation of complexity”. Shapiro (1987, p. 635) sees a place for “the social organization of distrust” through “guardians of trust” which serve a functional (rather than dysfunctional) role, integral to the promotion of trust (Bakir & Barlow 2007, p. 14).

Trust takes on a new significance as the corollary to “risk”, now a popular frame for analysing the contemporary, globalised world. The proliferation and scale of risk in contemporary society thus amplifies the importance and contingent nature of trust. Ulrich Beck’s concept of the risk society, which is helpful in elucidating this, hinges on the way in which society is now organized around the management of manufactured risks:

The concept of risk reverses the relationship of past, present and future. The past loses its power to determine the present. Its place as the cause of present-day experience and action is taken by the future, that is to say something non-existent, constructed and fictitious. We are discussing and arguing about something which is
not the case, but could happen if we were not to change course. Believed risks are the whip used to keep the present-day moving along at a gallop. (Beck, 2000, p. 214)

In Risk Society, Beck (1992) identified risk as a key attribute of the reflexive phase of late capitalism, as society loses confidence in how things are judged as rational and safe having recognized: the underlying industrial causes; that private enterprise escapes financial responsibility; and the role science plays in legitimising the situation. This means that the issue of trust in authorities is constantly being raised, invoking what Lash (1994) has called “active trust” where official accounts are up for contestation, where trust is always contingent.

Social psychological research has found that competence and honesty are critical in winning trust. Thus some argue that the public distrust targeted communications that avoid engagement or consultation (Bakir & Barlow, 2007, p. 15). This suggests a key position for the media as brokers of public trust.

Trust and the media

The relationship between public trust and contemporary media is now an established focus of research (Biltereyst, 2004; Bakir & Barlow, 2007; Putnam, 2004). Theories about the social significance of trust, taking a broader view, offer deeper understanding of how trust is constructed and how this has changed over time, and so shed more light on what changes in public trust in the media might mean for the future. Drawing on the ideas of Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, Biltereyst observes the close association of “trust” and “authority” in traditional societies noting a definitional change in “post-traditional modern society”:

Formulaic truth was replaced by modernist belief in the corrigibility of knowledge, while trust in abstract systems was more difficult to generate. Especially in the conditions of late modernity, mechanisms of trust shifted while expertise was contested ... In late modern society, with its circumstances of uncertainty, multiple choices and possible lifestyles, the need to trust is intrinsically linked to growing doubt and risk. (Biltereyst, 2004, p. 349)

In their discussion in The Age of Suspicion, Bakir and Barlow outline how trust has been theorised as both arising from common value systems and contributing to the establishment of common goals, serving as “social glue” (Bakir & Barlow, 2007, p. 12). Similarly, Putnam’s (2000) research on social capital explores the role of trust in this regard, signaling the importance of social networks as trust-building mechanisms that enable society to function effectively. Like Lash, Giddens uses the term “active trust”, applying it rather differently as
being “at the origin of new forms of social solidarity” and as “necessarily geared to the other”. This active engagement of trust invokes a role commonly played by public service media - broadcasting diverse special interest programming, thereby contributing to bridging cultural difference by eroding suspicion and actively building trust across different cultural groups (1994, p. 186). These functions commonly associated with trust, in tandem with key attributes of digital media technology - interactivity and multichannel possibilities - do offer public broadcasters a distinct point of difference with commercial media, a means of proving public value.

Apart from the general decline of social trust, declining public trust in the media can be attributed to some specific factors. As already mentioned, increasing conglomeration in ownership, initially arising from media deregulation, became a pattern around the world in the 1980s and 1990s. Web 2.0 has bought a new wave of conglomeration as old media moguls acquire new media companies (such as News Limited’s purchase of MySpace) and as new media giants digest one another (Google’s acquisition of YouTube). Secondly, the unstable qualities of the digital domain also destabilise trust: ease of reproduction and malleability foster a “culture of copy” and “sharing” that transgress conventional concepts of authenticity/legitimacy; the spread of conversational opinion and rumour online via blogs and social networks displaces factual reporting as news (Keen 2007, pp 64-96); speed of delivery online drives hourly news updating leaving corrections unacknowledged; “amateur” journalists write un-curtailed by professional obligations to ethics or the law (Hirst & Harrison, 2007, pp. 240-61); easy anonymity shields those with fraudulent intent; hyperlinks and frames facilitate the blurring of editorial and advertising content; intrusions on personal privacy from online consumer profiling applications such as cookies and spyware; along with online security threats from malware of various kinds that routinely thwart protection software. Thirdly, as also noted earlier, there is the rise of the public relations (PR) sector and the role of public relations professionals as mediators of political news (Louw 2005); a development in which opinion polling and controlled access to politicians and political information via media management, limits election coverage and political reporting, variously termed “plebiscitary democracy” and “government by focus group” (Scammell, 1995, Schlesinger, 2006). Bakir and Barlow note this as a key reason underlying a general declining public trust of government (Bakir & Barlow, 2007, p. 5). With adversarial interviewing the media’s stock rebuttal of PR manipulation, viewers are left short changed on political analysis.

That PSB is not immune to this crisis of trust was evident in Britain during and after the 2004 Hutton Enquiry, which investigated BBC reporting on the Blair Government’s dossier of
reasons for invading Iraq, following the suicide of Dr David Kelly, the source for the BBC story. Lord Hutton’s Report, which criticized the BBC, subsequently resulted in the resignation of both the BBC Chairman and Director General. However, as British broadcaster, Steve Barnett reports, “opinion polls in the wake of Hutton consistently showed that voters trusted the BBC a great deal more than the government” (Barnett, 2006, p. 61) indicating heightened public cynicism regarding government “spin”. Between 2005-2007 a series of scandals kept public trust in British broadcasting in the media spotlight (BBC, 2007). Driving BBC management into a state of prolonged angst about public trust, the scandals indicate both the new dangers of proprietary relationships (unfair charging – albeit unintentional - in on-air, premium phone line competitions), and the perils of trying to compete with commercial populism (reflected in provocative out-of-sequence editing of an impromptu comment by the Queen in a television documentary promotion).

Anxiety about PSBs and public trust is not confined to Britain. Around the world the heightened emphasis public service broadcasters are placing on accountability and mechanisms for building trust is evident in the emergence of new systems of governance and performance measurement – strategies employed to justify public funding. Coppens and Saeys discuss negotiation of periodical contracts with specific mandatory tasks for PSBs (Coppens & Saeys, 2006, p. 261). Such measures seek to legitimise public funding by “proving” delivery of charter goals. In Australia the ABC instituted a Director of Editorial Policy in 2006 to oversee “balance” in response to prolonged government accusations of bias, or “bullying” as it has also been described (Lawrence, 2007, p. 6). Despite trust-building objectives institutional timidity is a natural outcome of such measures, emerging through reduced creative risk taking (since ratings are increasingly important too), and in self-censorship with the abandonment of fearless scrutiny of power elites. Both broadcaster Quentin Dempster (2005; 2008a) and academic Robert Manne (2007) have written about timidity at the ABC. Dempster identified the emergence of a “careful blandness” in ABC news and current affairs.

It is not a question of left versus right as some critics of the ABC feebly contend. Nor is it a question about balance in the airtime allocated to adversarial voices. It is rather, a question of the lack of enough rigorous analysis, resourceful reporting and fearless exposure of what has been concealed. (Dempster, 2005, p. 106)

Writing about the Howard Government’s “culture war” with the ABC - most evident in Senator Alston’s 59 accusations of bias against ABC Radio National – Robert Manne argued that subsequent “nervousness on questions of political and ideological sensitivity” ultimately
damaged ABC Iraq war coverage. Timidity under pressure seems likely to erode public trust in the ABC as the provider of news and current affairs with “no fear or favour” – in the words of a 2006 on-air promotion. In his December 2007 article for The Monthly, Manne details how the “culture wars” against a presumed left wing bias have changed the range of voices heard on political issues on ABC television, with many articulate left wing experts now excluded from the airwaves (Manne, 2007).

Another recent ABC trend that has implications for trust is the increased push for outsourcing of production, which necessarily leads to a reduction in in-house production staff. There is anecdotal evidence from filmmakers with experience in both situations in Australia and New Zealand, that in-house production frequently offers more creative freedom and opportunities to innovate than the freelance environment, where funders require recipients to accommodate overseas market needs - to facilitate sales and a return on the public investment (Debrett, 2007, pp. 148-9; 184-5). The support network of experienced colleagues/mentors is another advantage of in-house production. Head of ABC television Kim Dalton has explained his drive for increased production outsourcing as bringing more money to ABC production, thus increasing hours of local content on screen (Dalton, 2008). While one solution here obviously is more government funding for local drama and documentary, the increased outsourcing compromise potentially imperils public trust, favouring the needs of the local commercial film/television sector to reach global markets, over the national public interest the ABC is directed to serve. The latter involves the delivery of resources for cultural citizenship – programming that informs various sectors of society about each other (Murdock, 1999).

Keeping a careful balance between in-house production (where the public service ethos is supported through collegial corps d’esprit) and outsourcing (which broadens and diversifies the production base) is important for retaining public trust. It is also the case that the ABC’s history rebounds with incidents where staff have defended the broadcaster’s editorial independence and public service ethos against management pragmatism (Inglis, 2006; Dempster, 2000). Thus the ABC’s scale as an employer, and its status as a comprehensive service rather simply addressing market failure, is also relevant to its trustworthiness.

These key areas where the ABC has traditionally taken greater risks than commercial media, are now threatened by new policies: the new emphasis on policing journalistic “balance” in response to political pressure appears to have increased self-censorship; and the move to increased outsourcing of drama and documentary production, apparently in response to financial pressure, threatens to subjugate public interest values to commercial ones. Of the contemporary push for stronger mechanisms for ensuring accountability, philosopher Onora O’Neill noted in her third Reith Lecture on trust:
Serious and effective accountability, I believe, needs to concentrate on good governance, on obligations to tell the truth and needs to seek intelligent accountability. I think it has to fantasise much less about Herculean micro-management by means of performance indicators or total transparency. If we want a culture of public service, professionals and public servants must in the end be free to serve the public rather than their paymasters. (O’Neill, 2002c, p.5)

Risktaking is integral to the ABC’s role with directives to be innovative and reflect cultural diversity included in its charter. Also invoking a degree of risk, separate requirements in the editorial policies for news and current affairs stipulate the need for journalists to be impartial and questioning. As ABC legal adviser, Bruce Donald argues, good journalists need to be prepared to risk a defamation suit to do their jobs properly (ABC 1995).

New Media, PSBs and Trust

For ABC Managing Director, Mark Scott, the new multiplatform structure is enabling the broadcaster “to connect with more Australians in more ways more often” (Scott, 2009). He compares this to “hosting the conversation”, identifying a new role for the ABC: “being the town square where a range of voices can be heard and exchanged with each other, not just listen to us broadcasting to them”. Analysing ABC Online’s capacity to serve this role, Toija Cinque has noted the importance of “a (post) modern form of citizenry” arising from a variety of online activities:

This development allows ABC Online innovative ways to promote an informed citizenry through access to educational and informational services … The promotion of an informed citizenry by the ABC is arguably imperative in a new media environment for three reasons: (1) an informed and educated citizenry is best served by the new technology providing accurate and independent information that the public broadcaster can offer; (2) new technologies are increasingly seen as an essential part of democratic practice and education; and (3) the goal of promoting an informed citizenry is not met elsewhere in commercial oligopolies. (Cinque, 2007, p. 92)

The interactive potential of digital platforms contributes a new line of accountability for public service media: a rejuvenated and transparent publicness through social networking; the delivery of diverse specialised content through sites such as Art Post where Australian artists
can post profiles and images of their work; and sites for public debate such as *Unleashed* and *ABC Fora* where “ordinary” Australians can participate in discussions with commentators with specialist knowledge or experience, and make their opinions known.

However, these new on-demand media contain a number of anomalies for public service broadcasters. The previously discussed unstable nature of digital technologies and the anonymity available on online platforms foster non-accountability, cyber-crime and surveillance, which do not invite trust. Yet these qualities also justify the involvement of public service media as multiplatform providers - to establish a trusted place online. The interactive potential of social networking also offers greater user/audience accountability and cost-efficient accommodation of pluralist needs, serving a community building role. But as part of a PSB portal such content requires moderation and careful judgement as to what is legitimate in terms of user comment/content and external hyperlinks. For many such moderation goes against the grain of the democratising potential of online communication, echoing the gatekeeper role of “old media”, despite its goal of protecting users from potential abuse. Web moderation, as Cinque observes, also slows user-interactivity and is generally not done on commercial web sites, which are naturally faster as a result. Establishing online moderation as a trustworthy characteristic thus requires careful education about the nature of online media (Cinque, 2007, p. 97). Properly negotiated with users, moderation offers a means of building social trust in public service media but raises the bar in terms of intervention. As Cinque has noted, various sites on ABC Online have conflicting policies regarding the use of external hyperlinks taking viewers beyond the ABC portal. These signal some ambivalence about the function and purpose of ABC Online – safe haven or town square. While it is not impossible to integrate both, as Cinque indicates differences in approach should be transparent (p. 97). Clarification of this kind is also important in insuring continued trust in the ABC as an institution committed to risk-taking – both in creative production and public interest journalism. In March 2009 the ABC introduced new editorial policies, launching ABC Values and specific guidelines for the application of these to user generated content along with three levels of moderation.

The global reach and easy access of the Internet as a distribution platform in the Web 2.0 era brings an additional threat to ABC trust. While ABC television has a long history of commercial licensing arrangements, the potential scope and scale of such operations in the digital era enhances the threat of commercial back-doorism, potentially undermining public trust in ABC independence and freedom from commercial vested interests. Concerns voiced regarding advertising on the ABC’s mobile platform on the ABC’s own *Media Watch* program in September 2008 were dismissed by ABC management as part of existing licensing
arrangements. The *Media Watch* website subsequently noted management confirmed that ‘ABC Commercial is developing commercial sites in partnership with third party companies’ (ABC 2008b). The re-branding of *ABC Enterprises* as *ABC Commercial* has presumably been undertaken to ameliorate damage to the ABC’s independent status.

**Conclusion**

While the opportunities arising from online and digital technology in terms of engaging citizenry appear something of a new dawn for PSB, the debate about accountability and trust involves other developments largely driven by financial and political pressures. As discussed, these include new mechanisms for editorial balance, the new implications of content licensing in the multiplatform digital era, and perceptions of reduced risk taking and creative independence (Dempster 2008, Howe, 2009). For the ABC, these developments are all affecting how trust - as a key brand attribute – is defined.

With the proliferation of media around the globe, trustworthiness has become more valuable as a distinguishing attribute but has also arguably become more ambiguous and difficult to define as a characteristic of public service media as it is employed towards various ends. At the ABC, trust is currently employed in several ways. There are moves to reinforce and prove institutional trustworthiness through greater accountability - via new strictures on editorial “balance” and rejuvenation of the internal public complaints processes (Simons 2008). Following a decade of government accusations of bias or “bullying” (Lawence, 2007) this is presumably motivated by a perceived need to keep governments on side; political parties of both sides have complained of ABC bias (Dempster, 2000, pp 56-61; 314-5). Trust is integral to the projection of “quality” as a marker of ABC programming – reliable, well researched and crafted – and a factor in drawing users to engage with complementary content online, subsequently driving digital take-up. Undoubtedly, however it is the reputation of ABC news as well researched, impartial and independent that has been a key selling point for those new media organizations that now have licensing arrangements with ABC news (ABC Commercial, 2009). In addition the active time and place shifting of audiences online (Dalton, 2007) requires a re-thinking of how to interpret editorial policies to accommodate the diverse needs of different audience groups for on-demand content – the need to both stimulate and protect children and to serve citizens through inviting open engagement with online information and resources.

Balancing three imperatives - providing reliable, safe content for young people, being accountable, and the risk-taking inherent in Charter goals (being innovative and delivering
impartial and independent news and current affairs) – is necessary to preserve public trust in the ABC. Identifying independence as the cornerstone of public broadcasting, Head of Policy for ABC Television, Michael Ward, also sees the ABC as having a new role to play in the 21st century arguing:

> Our content delivery is defined by our engagement with the community in terms of our Charter objectives, not just what might be identified to be those things, which are market failure examples. (Ward, 2008)

Given the implications of the crisis in public trust for citizenship and democracy, in tandem with contemporary financial constraints, the ABC’s new role looks to be rather more challenging than its old one.

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