Rethinking Public Service Media and Citizenship:
Digital Strategies for News and Current Affairs at Australia's Special Broadcasting Service

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This article considers the concept of media citizenship in relation to the digital strategies of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). At SBS, Australia's multicultural public broadcaster, there is a critical appraisal of its strategies to harness user-created content (UCC) and social media to promote greater audience participation through its news and current affairs Web sites. The article looks at the opportunities and challenges that user-created content presents for public service media organizations as they consolidate multiplatform service delivery. Also analyzed are the implications of radio and television broadcasters' moves to develop online services. It is proposed that case study methodologies enable an understanding of media citizenship to be developed that maintains a focus on the interaction between delivery technologies, organizational structures and cultures, and program content that is essential for understanding the changing focus of 21st-century public service media.

Introduction: Public Broadcasting and Multiplatform Media

Worldwide, public service media have been in a process of transition since the early 2000s. While much of the literature of the 1980s and 1990s was pessimistic about the future of public service broadcasting, viewing it as irrevocably caught in forces of dissolution such as channel proliferation, tightened public funding, and the loss of a once-clear sense of mission (Tracey, 1998), the 2000s have seen many public service broadcasters around the world identify opportunities for reinvention in the context of media convergence and multiplatform content delivery (Brugger & Burns, 2011). This coincides with discussions about 21st-century media ecology, and the wide-ranging transformation of public service broadcasters from entities with a mission of serving the nation through radio and TV, to public service media organizations contributing to a flourishing digital commons and providing content across multiple platforms to diverse publics (Coleman, 2004; Moe, 2008; Murdock, 2005; Trappel, 2008). As citizenship principles and discourses have always been tied up with public service broadcasting, such developments imply new ways of thinking about the relationship of media to citizenship, driven by forces such as globalization, the increasingly multicultural nature of nation-states, the proliferation of digital information and communication technologies (ICTs), and the rise of social media.

This article addresses such questions in the context of two case studies conducted between 2008 and 2010 with the Special Broadcasting Service on the impact of digital media and user-created content (UCC) on the organization, in general, and on its news and current affairs programs, in particular. The first case study focuses on issues arising from UCC for SBS's provision of news—specifically, how such content is used on its Web sites as a facilitator of greater bottom-up community participation—and the challenges this presents for existing modes of news gathering, journalistic professionalism, and the expectations of both SBS audiences and other stakeholders (e.g., government). The second case study looks at a significant upgrade of SBS news and current affairs sites that occurred in 2009. This study seeks not only to consider the performance metrics of these upgraded Web pages for SBS' *World News Australia* and its television current affairs programs (*Insight*, *Dateline,* and *Living Black*), but also how they may open up new relationships between the institution, its journalists and on-air presenters, its audiences, and wider communities of interest. This work was undertaken with the Special Broadcasting Service as part of a larger project funded by the Australian Research Council through its Linkage-Projects program. The project looked into citizen journalism in Australia, and it also involved the development of a citizen journalism Web site around the 2007 Australian Federal election (DBCDE, 2009; Flew & Wilson, 2010). [1]

The history of SBS has long been tied to the shifting politics of Australian multiculturalism. In the course of the study, there was a change of government in Australia, with the 11-year rule of the Conservative government led by John Howard giving way to the election of a Labor government. The new Labor government conducted a review of national broadcasting in 2008–2009 through its newly created Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. The ostensible drive behind the review was the perceived politicization of the national public broadcasters—the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and SBS—during the Howard years. However, it also provided an opportunity for an audit of performance and an identification of new challenges facing the two broadcasters, particularly those relating to digital technologies. Among the questions presented in the discussion paper as a basis for public submissions were the following:

- The principal function of SBS is to provide multilingual and multicultural broadcasting services for all Australians, reflecting our multicultural society. Is this an appropriate function for SBS in a 2020 media environment and, if so, how should it harness the available digital technologies to fulfil this function?

- Are there opportunities for the national broadcasters to more effectively fulfil the objectives of universal access and the provision of local content by utilizing new delivery platforms, such as broadband Internet?

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[1] The Australian Research Council Linkage-Project was titled *Investigating Innovative Applications of Digital Media for Participatory Journalism and Citizen Engagement in Australian Public Communication*, with other members of the research team to include Axel Bruns, Stuart Cunningham and Jason Wilson. Industry partners were the Special Broadcasting Service, Cisco Systems Australia, and The National Forum, publishers of public affairs e-journal *On Line Opinion*. The ARC Linkage program promotes university research collaboration with industry, government, and community organizations.

- Should the charters of the national broadcasters be amended to more clearly define their broad programming directions and priorities? Should such priorities take into account the nature and reach of particular delivery platforms?

- What opportunities do new digital broadcasting and other platforms provide for the national broadcasters to more effectively deliver programming in languages other than English?

- Are there ways of better harnessing new media and broadcasting technologies to enhance the value of the national broadcasters' services to migrant groups, particularly those that are newly arrived? (DBCDE, 2008)

Our study provided the opportunity to use the findings from this research in debates about the future of both the SBS and public service media institutions more generally (Flew et al., 2008). A debate about the future of SBS after 30 years as a multicultural television service was featured at the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association conference held in Brisbane in July 2009 (Flew, 2009a). The issue of SBS's relationship to broader questions of media citizenship is also a prominent feature of the institutional history undertaken by Ang, Hawkins, and Dabboussy (2008), and while their study is focused on the relationship of SBS to multiculturalism and Australian cultural identity, the work related to the responses to digital media technologies is also germane to questions of cultural pluralism and media citizenship.

The study focused on news and current affairs programs on SBS Television. It was not based on an assumption that news and information programming are more important than entertainment. Indeed, within the media citizenship literature, there is a lively debate between those who adhere to a modernist understanding of politics and the public sphere, for whom the news and information function of public service broadcasters has primacy, and those who identify citizenship discourses across a range of television program genres (see Garnham, 2003; Hartley, 1999; and Jacka, 2003 for representative positions). Rather, news and current affairs provided the area where both the possibilities and the potential risks of a greater harnessing of user-related content into established SBS programs as they become multiplatform could be most clearly identified. It is also the case that *World News Australia* has a particularly important place at SBS, since it is Australia's most watched television program, and thus the most visible symbol of SBS having more global focus than any other Australian media—as well as its multicultural remit to the Australian population as a whole.

Media Citizenship: Establishing the Baselines

The concept of media citizenship has become increasingly significant in both political theory and communication and media studies over the last 30 years. In the 1980s and early 1990s, there was considerable work associated with theories of civil society and a (pre-Tony Blair) notion of a "Third Way" between a resurgent free market capitalism on the one hand, and the increasingly discredited models of state socialism on the other, whose Leninist understandings of media never fit well with the more libertarian impulses of the post-1968 New Left. Authors such as Keane (1988), Garnham (1990), Mulgan

(1990), and Curran (1991) proclaimed the possibilities for media institutions and practices grounded in a pluralistic civil society to enhance media diversity and democratization, with diversity, pluralism, and democracy providing alternative benchmarks through which media performance could be evaluated. With earlier "public interest" models of media regulation being challenged by more market-oriented approaches that focused upon consumer satisfaction and the delivery of new services (Feintuck, 2004; Freedman, 2008), authors such as Golding and Murdock (1989) returned to a "first principles" understanding of civil, political, and social citizenship to consider how communications and media systems best enable the rights of all citizens to be realized. Such dimensions of "cultural citizenship" or "media citizenship" included access to information; advice and analysis on matters concerning their rights; provision to all sections of the community of access to the broadest range possible of information, interpretation, and debate on issues of public significance; and enablement of people from all sections of society to recognize themselves in the available representations offered in the media, and to be able to contribute to the development and shaping of these representations.

While media citizenship has not yet become a central plank of contemporary political theory, it has been argued that it is in the realms of media, communication, and culture that many of the limitations of long-established citizenship discourses have become apparent. As modern forms of governance are based upon mediated interaction rather than direct speech and face-to-face communication, due to the size, complexity, and diversity of both modern nation-states and the societies they govern, it makes little sense to hanker for earlier forms of unmediated communication and citizen interaction (Thompson, 1995). As Dahlgren (2006) points out, debates about civil society and civic virtue reveal the degree to which the capacity to participate as a citizen is a process of learning by doing, grounded not only in social relations, but also in cultural practices, so that "civic competence cannot derive exclusively from political society; it emerges from the overall development of the subject" (ibid., p. 273). Moreover, citizenship not only has a political dimension of rights and responsibilities, but also national and cultural dimensions of belonging that pertain to what Anderson (1991) famously referred to as an "imagined community." Consideration of the "nationing" of citizens draws out the extent to which media are part of the armature of cultural institutions and practices that shape a sense of "everyday belonging" to a nation-state and the acquiring of a national identity (Schudson, 1994).

The centrality of media to contemporary democracy and citizenship is flagged in two major recent contributions to the literature. In *Communication Power*, Manuel Castells elaborates on the theme developed in his earlier *The Information Age* trilogy that 21st-century politics is primarily played out through the media and across communications networks:

> The media . . . are not the Fourth Estate. They are much more important: They are the space of power making. The media constitute the space where power relationships are decided between competing political and social actors. Therefore, almost all actors and messages must go through the media in order to achieve their goals. They have to accept the rules of media engagement, the language of the media, and media interests. (2009, p. 194)

Similarly, John Keane's *The Life and Death of Democracy* (2009) identifies a relationship between the crisis of representative democracies and the increased mediatization of politics. Keane also argues that politics is increasingly played out through the media, albeit through the quite different framework of what he refers to as "monitory democracy":

> Assembly-based democracy belonged to an era dominated by the spoken word, backed up by laws written on papyrus and stone . . . Representative democracy sprang up in the era of print culture—the book, pamphlet and newspaper, and telegraphed and mailed messages—and fell into crisis during the advent of early mass communication media . . . By contrast, monitory democracy is tied closely to the growth of multi-media-saturated societies—societies whose structures of power are continuously "bitten" by monitory institutions operating within a new galaxy of media defined by the ethos of communicative abundance. (ibid., p. 737)

Establishing some baselines about how to understand and critically interpret contemporary developments in media citizenship requires acknowledgment of the differing directions in which the field has proceeded. Three approaches are notable. The first direction works with the totality of media representations—ranging from information to entertainment—to understand how they shape contemporary subjectivities, and to identify elements of citizen formation and popular pedagogy. While this approach can be applied across all media, it has been most influential in television studies, as well as in the traditions and methodologies associated with textual analysis (Hartley, 2002; Miller, 2007; Ouellette & Hay, 2008). The second approach focuses on media institutions, particularly on role played by public service broadcasting (PSB) media, which are often seen as a bulwark against the limitations associated with advertiser-financed commercial media, with their legislated charter obligations and institutional ethos oriented toward citizenship goals (Curran, 1991; Garnham, 1990, 2003; Murdock, 1992; Ouellette & Lewis, 2000; Tracey, 1998). A third approach counterposes mass communication media, characterizing it as a one-way, top-down mode of communication, with the new digital media associated with the Internet. It proposes that the multidirectional flows of messages that typify such media offer new possibilities for more interactive and participatory forms of popular engagement, and hence, for potentially more democratic forms of media citizenship (Bennett et al., 2009; Bruns, 2008; Coleman, 2005; Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Collins, 2004; Jenkins, 2006).[2]

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[2] The purpose of this paper is not to put these approaches to media citizenship in direct dialogue with one another. At the same time, it is worth noting two problems with the assumption that media citizenship is synonymous with public service broadcasting, and not a part of commercially driven media. The first point, raised in the debate between Jacka (2003) and Garnham (2003), is that commercial media do contribute to goals associated with political and other forms of citizenship. The other is that there is a gulf between PSB, as understood at a normative level, and what public broadcasters actually do. Rather than presenting a lapsarian account of this as evidence of the "failure" of PSBs, Collins (2004) argues that it provides evidence of positive interaction between commercial media and PSBs, particularly in their competition for audiences, which makes them more responsive to demand than would be the case if PSB monopolies were to prevail.

The SBS as Australia's Multicultural Broadcaster

The Special Broadcasting Service was established in 1978, and it first broadcast as a television service in Australia in 1980. Its origins lay in the politics of multiculturalism that gained momentum in Australia during the 1970s, emerging at two levels. First, there was the failure of Australia's existing broadcasters—including the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), as Australia's public service broadcaster—to respond to an increasingly culturally diverse population, meaning that Malcolm Fraser's Liberal-Country Party government opted to establish a new broadcasting service, rather than to allow the ABC a second television channel, which it had sought throughout the 1970s.[3] Second, promotion of an SBS television service was seen as a way for the conservative parties to be looked upon as less Anglo-centric and more supportive of the aspirations of Australia's non-English-speaking background migrant communities, hoping to short circuit a growing electoral alliance between these communities and the Australian Labor Party (ALP).

At the same time, seeing SBS as primarily an expression of multicultural policy and politics in the mediasphere runs the risk of losing sight of its significance as an innovative television service (Hartley, 1992). SBS TV has always sought to operate more as a general interest service, with programs that have broader appeal than simply being primarily or exclusively targeted to the community or language group of their country of origin. The general audience here includes both Australian-born viewers and other ethnic communities, and subtitling has always been vitally important for SBS' non-English language programming. "Broad appeal" does not mean programs aimed to maximize audience share, as SBS has always understood itself as a provider of lower-cost "minoritarian" programming targeted at audience segments, rather than as a direct ratings competitor to the commercial broadcasters (O'Regan, 1993). SBS innovated as a television service by pursuing forms of programming where there was perceived unmet audience demand, such as European "art house" cinema, soccer, or strong programming on timeslots traditionally neglected by the other networks, such as Saturday nights. The SBS television programming mix has tended to be generic, with certain timeslots allocated to particular program types, rather than to programming from any specific language group, as has been the practice with SBS radio. The *SBS World News* has been long regarded as one of its flagship programs, with the majority of its stories coming from overseas. It places an emphasis on providing news from a number of countries—not just the United States and Britain—and providing an ongoing commentary on aspects of Australian multiculturalism and matters of particular relevance to indigenous Australians.

In 2010, the SBS provided radio and television services in more than 60 languages, aiming to reflect and contribute to the further development of Australia's multicultural society. In their recent history of SBS, Ang, Hawkins, and Dabboussy described SBS as "one of Australia's most important cultural institutions," as it "has given cultural diversity visibility in the media and in the process it has made Australian culture richer, more varied and more inclusive" (2008, pp. 1, 4). They argue that SBS

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[3] From the time of its establishment in 1932, the ABC was the Australian Broadcasting Commission. It became the Australian Broadcasting Corporation under the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act* (1983). The legislation that formalized the establishment of the SBS, the *Special Broadcasting Service Act* (1983), was passed in the same period by the Australian parliament.

Television has carved out an internationally recognized profile as a broadcaster that critically reflects on the challenges of a multicultural society, not only providing non-English language programming for Australia's ethnic and other minorities, but providing all Australians with access to programming from throughout the world that facilitates cross-cultural communication and acts as "a force for integration . . . bringing together various viewpoints and experiences within a common public sphere" (ibid., p. 7). They understand the relationship between SBS's multicultural remit and its programming and network branding strategies as revolving around three conceptions of multiculturalism:

1. *Ethno-multiculturalism*: This approach is focused on the particular needs and interests of migrants and ethnic communities, with a large amount of programming in languages other than English. This has been how SBS Radio has mostly operated, but this approach was not taken with SBS Television from its inception.

2. *Cosmopolitan multiculturalism*: This approach encourages all Australians to embrace global cultural diversity through innovative high-quality programming sourced from around the world. The focus on "world movies" has long been an expression of this, as has been a strong commitment to documentaries, themed programming weeks (e.g., "About Women," "About Sex"), and what has been termed "activist TV," where programs aim to trigger wider community debates.

3. *Popular multiculturalism*: This is less about promoting multicultural diversity, but more about characterizing it as a feature of mainstream Australian culture. SBS' long commitment to soccer, as both the major sport of Australia's migrant communities and the sport least well-covered by the other TV networks, has long been a part of this. Focusing on popular multiculturalism can include locally produced programs that have a subversive and irreverent take on Australian multiculturalism, such as the comedy series *Pizza* (which ran from 2000–2005), as well as programs that explore multiculturalism through food and cooking, such as *The Food Lover's Guide to Australia* (1996–2006). It also includes programs that frankly have nothing to do with Australian multiculturalism, such as the animated comedy *South Park* and the British car program *Top Gear,* which have often attracted larger audiences, particularly those young people that SBS has often struggled to reach.

The history of SBS has been a contentious one. On the one hand, there have always been those who have questioned whether Australia needs a specialist multicultural broadcaster, or whether it is unduly separatist. During the period of the Howard Liberal-National Party government (1996–2007), there was an active shift away from multiculturalism in the public policy domain, although the "culture wars" did not bring as much pressure on SBS as upon ABC, the main Australian public broadcaster (Cunningham, 2009). On the other hand, there has been recurring criticism of whether SBS has irrevocably strayed from its charter remit to provide specialist and multicultural broadcasting services toward commercial populism or cosmopolitan elitism—reflective of the priorities of what has, for the most part, been management drawn from the established television industry rather than from ethnic communities themselves (e.g., Jakubowicz & Newell, 1995). O'Regan observed that SBS TV has been "continually caught in the

contradiction basic to being a narrowcast national broadcaster: the desire to maximize the size of its narrowcast audience, and to maximize its services to particular, highly defined constituencies" (1993, p. 146). There is also the issue that SBS was established as a low-cost broadcaster, and it has consistently struggled to get budget appropriations from the federal government both to maintain its ongoing activities, and to undertake new initiatives, such as local production. During the 1990s and 2000s, SBS supplemented its government allocation with advertising revenue, but this, in turn, fueled criticism that it has been shifting away from programming aimed at ethnic communities and toward popular fare—such as *Top Gear* and *South Park*.

SBS has been addressing questions of the continuing relevance of its multicultural mission since the beginning of the 2000s. These questions have been voiced in studies such as the *Living Diversity* report into the continuing salience of multicultural discourse as a means of capturing Australia's cultural diversity (Ang et al., 2002), and the *Connecting Diversity* study into how younger Australians understand multiculturalism (Ang et al., 2006). These studies found that questions of multiculturalism continued to have resonance in Australian society and culture, although there was an issue of how responsive institutions such as SBS had been to more recently arrived migrant communities, such as those from South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. It is acknowledged by SBS management, for instance, that program scheduling continues to favor well-established European migrant communities, even if less attachment to SBS among more recently arrived migrant communities may be reflective of the degree to which "a sense of cohesive ethnic communities . . . has certainly broken down, and is much less hard to motivate as a political force"(Meagher, 2009).

The other major issues arising for SBS in the 21st century, which were a part of the *Review of National Broadcasting* discussed in the Introduction, relate to the implications of multiplatform media for the charter remit of public service broadcasters and the rise of broadband Internet as an alternative content distribution system. The wider context for such debates are the transformations occurring from the one-to-many mass communications models that dominated the 20th century, toward various manifestations of participatory media culture, enabled by the Internet and networked digital media technologies, and promoting not only niche media, but do-it-yourself and do-it-with-others social media (Flew, 2009b, 2010; Jenkins, 2006). In this rapidly changing sociotechnical context, there is a blurring of lines of authority and information flow between producers and consumers of media, leading to the rise of what Bruns (2008) has termed the "produser," or the media user who publishes and disseminates digital content, as well as consuming media. Just as these developments pose dilemmas for incumbent media about new business models for a media environment characterized by information abundance and empowered users (McNair, 2006), they also present challenges to the ideological authority of journalists as the media professionals best able to interpret social reality and perform a gatekeeping function over the flow of informational content on behalf of a passive public.

An issue of immediate significance to SBS and ABC is that their enabling legislation, passed in both cases in 1983, makes no reference to online media. Both are empowered by parliament to deliver radio and television services only, and they are funded accordingly. There is also the question of what they wish to do with their online sites. Media organizations typically think of the online site as an adjunct to their established media platforms of print, radio, and television, but such an approach significantly

devalues the extent to which the online environment is more radically transformative of media production cultures, particularly those related to news and journalism, as "the unmanaged and perhaps unmanageable nature of the network itself . . . creates an essentially infinite, unbounded product," and as "collaborative decision making erases old divisions of labor in the newsroom and, increasingly, draws on external input as well" (Singer, 2010, pp. 107, 108). This creates a new matrix of challenges and threats, but also opportunities for publicly funded media organizations. In particular, it raises the issue of whether they should be reconceived as public service media organizations, rather than as public service broadcasters, developing a service-based and platform-neutral understanding of their mission and their role in the broader media ecology in relation to content diversity and media citizenship (Coleman, 2004; Moe, 2008; Trappel, 2008). It also presents the question of the extent to which the sites should be opened up to the public in the sense of allowing citizens to be the content creators themselves, radically altering long established hierarchies of media production and consumption.

User-Created Content and SBS News and Current Affairs

An important issue facing SBS, as with all broadcasters in a multiplatform media environment, is the need to better understand the impact of online media on its news and current affairs programs, as well as on its news production and distribution processes. An element of our collaboration with SBS involved co-supervision of a graduate student undertaking ethnographic action research within SBS over 2007–2008, including a series of interviews with key decision makers about UCC and how SBS may best incorporate this into their online news services.[4] This study was modeled, in part, on Georgina Born's pioneering study into the British Broadcasting Corporation during the years when John Birt was managing director (Born, 2004), as well as the studies into UCC at the BBC undertaken through Cardiff University (Wardle & Williams, 2008).

Five major research findings can be drawn out of this organizational analysis of how SBS responded to the question of user-created content in relation to its news and current affairs programs. The first finding was that *the opportunity for user-created content to enhance what SBS offers in news and current affairs was widely recognized within the organization*, albeit with significant caveats, to be discussed in greater detail below. The online world provides access to a range of sources of niche reporting, pro-am video, and commentary that can certainly serve as valuable adjunct material to international news stories, and it can also provide the basis for a wider horizon of perspectives and views on issues. As SBS does not have the budget for a network of foreign correspondents, it has typically been heavily reliant upon material sourced from international news services, such as CNN and the BBC. As such, in terms of its credentials as a distinctive international news service, it has an interest in diversifying its range of source material. There is also the potential for SBS to lever its links to Australia's many ethnic communities to develop informal networks of community-based specialist reporters with access to information from many countries. These reporters may have insights into political, cultural, and other factors that may not be apparent to reporters from the large international news services. Such optimism

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[4] The graduate student was Heidi Lenffer, whose Master of Arts thesis, titled *User-Generated Content and Public Broadcasters: A Case Study of the Special Broadcasting Service*, was awarded by the Queensland University of Technology in 2009. The thesis can be accessed at http://eprints.qut.edu.au/30419/

toward UCC runs against a common perception, among both journalists and journalism educators (e.g., Knight, 2008), that there is an irrevocable antagonism between mainstream professional journalists and bloggers and pro-am media content producers.

At the same time, to make the second point, there is awareness that *different issues present themselves as requiring close management of news material when it is distributed across multiple media platforms.* In the case of SBS, the audience expectations of television news bulletins are such that UCC would not be considered to be of a suitable standard for broadcasting, and would not be provided with the quality and regularity that material from industry professionals is. UCC could be the basis for niche programs rather than the main news bulletins, but there was a view that its natural home would be in more locally based services—such as the rural and regional networks operated by the ABC—rather than the flagship news broadcasts. In contrast, SBS Online offers much better scope for the incorporation of UCC than SBS Television, as there is no inherent constraint to the amount of material that can be provided (unlike news bulletins with 30- or 60-minute timeslots). Expectations are different about online content, in terms of its quality—particularly audio-visual content—are different, and the ancillary services, such as chat rooms, discussion forums, blogs, Twitter feeds, etc., can hang off news stories and current affairs pieces more effectively. The current affairs program *Insight,* which draws on a live studio audience that includes experts on different subjects, has become considerably more interactive on its Web site since 2010. The ABC has also promoted the use of platforms such as Twitter with its panel-based current affairs program *Q & A*, which is also recorded with a live studio audience.

The third issue relates to *the relationship between SBS's news "brand," its reputation for accuracy in its international news and current affairs stories, and questions of balance and bias that arise for SBS as a public service broadcaster*. *World News Australia* has always been a central plank of SBS's identity in the wider Australian community, being one of its most watched programs, and the most common reference point for those wishing to note the value of SBS as a television service receiving government funding. Its international reach is a vitally important part of that, but so, too, are expectations that its news maintains standards that demonstrate both a focus on "high end" international news stories and a degree of accuracy and even-handedness in its presentation of issues. There are many instances where SBS is reporting on an international conflict where different communities in the dispute are well represented among the Australian population: Examples include the 1990s civil war in the former Yugoslavia; the civil war in Sri Lanka; and conflicts in the Middle East, such as the Israeli incursion into Lebanon in 2006, or the takeover of the Turkish peace ship the *Mavi Marmara* by Israeli forces in 2010. In these and many other instances, SBS frequently walks a tightrope against allegations of bias from one or another of the relevant communities, and community leaders have been particularly likely to take SBS to task for its coverage on such issues, sometimes more so than commercial media or the ABC, as the stakes are seen as higher in their own communities. The risk for SBS in extending its use of UCC in such stories is that material generated from one or another of the relevant communities would be particularly open to accusations of bias. The challenge for SBS is that, while it has a charter obligation to "contribute to extending the range of Australian television and radio services, and reflect the changing nature of Australian society by presenting many points of view and using innovative forms of expression," (*SBS Charter*, Part [h]), it also needs to maintain credibility across all sections of the Australian community, including those immigrants who are in conflict and disagreement with others back in their own homelands.

The fourth point relates to *the continuing need for the editorial function in news selection, filtering and framing, particularly in the context of considering the use of UCC*. The shift toward immediacy and reporting on demand, along with diversification of sources beyond established news agencies and employed reporters, raises questions of how facts are checked, stories verified, and the editorial function exercised. The case of the October 2008 hoax carried on CNN's user-driven *iReport* site, in which a report that Apple co-founder and CEO Steve Jobs had suffered a heart attack led to a sharp fall in Apple's stock price, drew attention to the dangers to brand reputation that can arise from unfiltered news content on established news sites. At the same time, public broadcasters such as SBS may be particularly well-placed to maximize the vision of participatory media, as they bring considerable resources of trust and community goodwill to an online field marked by the proliferation of news and information sources. Rather than relying on pure user-created content, what often emerges are a continuum of contributors who deal with online news sites on a periodic basis and receive payment for their contributions. While SBS has not developed down this path, the last two years saw media organizations launch online sites that are driven by a mix of staff content and opinion pieces by paid contributors: Examples include *The Punch* (News Limited), *The Drum* and *Unleashed* (ABC), and *National Times* (Fairfax Media). Payments to such "pro-am" contributors draw attention to the extent to which monetization of UCC is becoming increasingly common, thereby blurring the distinction between professionals and "citizen journalists," and meaning that such contributions may be less driven by nonfinancial motivations such as "connecting with peers, achieving fame, notoriety or prestige, and expressing oneself" (OECD, 2007, p. 20). A contributor to the ABC's *Unleashed* site, for instance, would be paid AU$200 for generating a feature article and participating in the resulting online discussion, a model more akin to freelance feature writing than the world of free content.

The final set of issues relate to *the legal implications of UCC.* Among the risks presented by UCC and open structures for online participation by users are those of promoting racial, religious, and other forms of vilification; defamation; contempt of court; and misuse of copyright and other forms of intellectual property. For site hosts such as SBS, the issue is how to manage for such risks without relying on pre-moderation (checking all comments before they are posted on a site), as this can be the death knell for the conversation and interaction among participants that is the ultimate *raison d'etre* of such participatory sites. The point made by those within SBS was that managing on the basis of the worst case scenario—the 1% of potentially problematic comments—may cause such sites to lose the dynamism that arises from rapid exchange of views among the 99% of contributors whose comments raise no such legal or other issues. It was noted that, again, public service media such as SBS may be better placed than others to manage such interactions, as the user communities tending to use the SBS site are perhaps less likely to hold, for instance, racist views than those contributing to other sites. It found that much can be learned from non-news sites, such as SBS's very popular *The World Game* soccer site, where frank exchanges of views are common, but some sense of acceptable boundaries emerges out of ongoing participant interaction.

Following the analysis of perspectives toward UCC at SBS, more study was undertaken during 2009 and 2010 of the transformations made to SBS news and current affairs Web sites. The four relevant programs were:

- *World News Australia*;

- *Dateline*, a magazine-style current affairs program focused on international news stories reported by SBS foreign correspondents, and hosted by veteran Australian journalist George Negus in 2009-2010;

- *Insight*, a studio-based discussion forum program broadcast live and focused on a particular topic, with a range of experts, decision makers, and people with public positions on the issue in the audience, as well as those who have been affected by it. These may be issues that are political in the more conventional sense (e.g., health policies, racist attacks on overseas students), or they may be more related to personal issues, such as addictions or growing up with divorced parents; and

- *Living Black*, an indigenous current affairs program focused on delivering stories concerning indigenous people, communities, and issues around Australia.

A primary motivation for these changes was to open up all of these sites to greater online participation through social media. Valerio Veo, executive producer (online) for SBS News and Current Affairs, who oversaw the changes during 2009–2010, described the underlying thinking in these terms:

> In my area of expertise—journalism—we're also seeing a fundamental shift in the way news is gathered—one that sits uncomfortably with so many in the industry used to the traditional "one-to-many" communication model. Initially coined "user-generated" content, then "citizen journalism" or "crowd-sourcing"—I think the term that best describes it is "collaborative journalism" . . . the underlying trends and behaviors are the same. Suddenly the audiences we have served are becoming the best place to source information and feed the never-ending news cycle. The skill of the journalist is changing from a single voice of trusted information into a curator of trusted information. The skills are the same—journalists are needed to verify, challenge, and update information—then create a clear narrative from this "many-to-many" conversation taking place on the Internet. (2009, pp. 24–25)

Among the strategies adopted were the development of Facebook pages and Twitter feeds for the programs, making more video material available online for downloading and live streaming, and encouraging journalists to make more use of social media platforms such as Twitter and YouTube to identify possible stories and information sources. Additional strategies included live discussion forums conducted during the *Insight* program and an on-site reporter commenting on Twitter correspondence live during the program. Arising from such changes, the *Dateline* page saw a 15% increase in online traffic in the five months to May 2010 compared to the previous year, and all sites have reported significant increases in online activity. Interestingly, 40% of traffic to the *Dateline* site comes from outside Australia, and while 56% of this traffic comes from the United States, Great Britain, Canada, and New Zealand, the balance has a very long tail, with site hits coming from 115 total countries. It was found that, often, the

most commented-upon stories were those where there are significant communities in Australia: An example was the March 2009 story "Hunting the Tigers" on the Sri Lankan civil war, which accounted for a large amount of the site visits from Sri Lanka, which, in turn, made up 4% of all site visits in 2009. The bulk of site visits happen either during the TV program or in the three hours following, which means that the majority of comments are moderated in real time. One notable feature of the *Dateline* site, which differs from the other sites, is the extent to which comments are often personally directed to the host, George Negus, whose high profile in Australian television is seen as giving him a degree of authorial authority over the program not seen in comments on other sites.

Conclusion

The case study of digital media strategies undertaken by Australia's Special Broadcasting Service has drawn insights about media citizenship from three angles. The first has been to identify the distinctive place of the SBS in national public broadcasting. SBS has been established as a service with an explicitly multicultural remit but seeking, in its television programming, to appeal to all Australians while also shifting mainstream discourses on cultural diversity. There is considerable debate about the extent to which SBS has successfully pursued a dual agenda in its practice of catering to Australia's ethnic minorities while also being a broad-appeal television service. But it certainly marks out a different approach to the role of public broadcasting concerning media citizenship and the public sphere from those of other public broadcasters established around a more unitary notion of the national polity and national culture.

Second, this study has considered arguments that the Internet and social media are transforming broadcast communications in ways that enable greater openness and participation, and can thus further media citizenship beyond the constraints presented by one-to-many mass communications. Insofar as public service media organizations can play a leading role in such changes, there will be a need to rethink their organizational structures, cultures, and legislative charters, as well as their funding arrangements, so that they can develop platform-neutral operations and open up these platforms for greater bottom-up participation and user interaction—all while maintaining their credibility and distinctiveness in the broader media ecology. This links debates about the future of SBS and the ABC as Australian national public service broadcasters to discussions about the transformation of public service broadcasters to public service media organizations contributing to the digital commons. But it is important to note that both the ABC and SBS have already taken considerable strides down such a path, and the questions are switching from whether to expand digital operations, to the wider policy and funding implications of a shift in production and distribution that is already occurring.

Finally, there has been an evaluation of both digital strategies at SBS and attitudes within the organization about created content. The principal finding here is that, on balance, the opportunities identified for opening up the news and current affairs platforms for greater user participation outweigh the not-insignificant risks, which include verifying the accuracy of material, managing questions of balance and perceived bias, audience perceptions of the SBS news "brand," and potential legal risks. It is apparent in considering such questions that the broadcast television platform remains a space where UCC initiatives are more constrained than those for online news media sites, and that the editorial function remains

highly significant in the context of UCC, even if the journalistic function is now in a considerable state of flux.

In terms of directly addressing multiculturalism and the increasingly culturally diverse and pluralist Australian nation, SBS was at the forefront of new ways of thinking about the relationship of public service broadcasting to media citizenship. This aspect of SBS's institutional history has been well-covered in the extensive literature on the history of this distinctive broadcasting service. The challenge presented to SBS by UCC and multiplatform media environments, as it is for other public service media organizations, is understanding the extent to which they can enhance their citizenship remit by opening up to the more participatory media cultures that social media is enabling, while still managing the potential risks that emerge as a result of a more open and fluid media environment.

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