

# **Social Innovation, User-Created Content and the Future of the ABC and SBS as Public Service Media**

**SUBMISSION TO ABC AND SBS REVIEW, DEPARTMENT OF BROADBAND, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY**

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**Professor Terry Flew, Media and Communication, Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia**

**Professor Stuart Cunningham, Director, ARC Centre of Excellence in Creative Industries and Innovation, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia**

**Dr. Axel Bruns, Senior Lecturer in Media and Communication, Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia**

**Dr. Jason Wilson, Lecturer in Digital Media and Communications, School of Social Sciences and Media, University of Wollongong.**

## 1. Summary

1. The question of how national public broadcasters respond to changes in the media environment arising from digitisation, convergence and changing societal needs and expectations can be best understood as a question of *social innovation*;
2. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century digital media environment, where all media outlets are multi-platform and digitised in their modes of content production and delivery, it is better to understand the ABC and SBS as *public service media* organizations, rather than public service broadcasters. This emphasises how it is the services provided, rather than the delivery platforms, that are at the core of rationales for public support of the ABC and SBS;
3. There is considerable scope for both ABC and SBS to enhance and renew their Charter obligation as and social innovation remit through public service media through *user-created content* strategies, particularly in their provision of online services.
4. For the ABC, UCC strategies can make a considerable contribution to its provision of Australian content in news and current affairs, localism and diversity of news and information, particularly through the development of *hyper-local content* that exploits its network of broadcast media outlets throughout Australia and its unique presence in non-metropolitan Australia.
5. For the SBS, UCC presents new opportunities to harness its unique relationship to Australia's diverse ethnic, language and cultural communities and its central role in the provision of international news and information, by enabling it to diversify its sources of news and other informational content material by reaching beyond the international news agencies to draw upon material sourced from 'pro-am' contributors around the world, and accessed locally through the Internet;

- 6. The ABC and SBS have the potential to be content innovators in the provision of news and information in ways that utilise UCC strategies, and to play a key role in growing international debates about the future of journalism and news media in an environment where media consumers are participants and content co-creators and not simply passive recipients of news and information. As public service media organizations, they are uniquely placed to enable new UCC opportunities in the online media space while also managing such content sourcing strategies with their policy, legal and Charter obligations, as well as questions of the accuracy and relevance of information, quality and credibility of news content and sources, and identity as highly respected news brands.**

## 2. About the Authors

**Professor Terry Flew** is Professor of Media and Communications in the Creative Industries Faculty at the Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia. He is the author of Australia's leading new media textbook, *New Media: An Introduction* (Oxford, 2008, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) and *Understanding Global Media* (Palgrave, 2007). He has also contributed book chapters to leading international publications such as *Dewesternising Media Studies* (eds. J. Curran and M.-J. Park, Routledge, 2000), *Handbook of New Media* (eds. L. Lievrouw and S. Livingstone, Sage, 2002), and *Creative Industries* (ed. J. Hartley, Blackwell, 2005), and has also been published in leading international academic journals such as *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, *Television and New Media*, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* and *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. He is First Chief Investigator on an ARC Linkages-Projects Grant titled *Investigating Innovative Applications of Digital Media for Participatory Journalism and Citizen Engagement in Australian Public Communication*, and leads the Audience and Market Foresight program for the *Smart Services Co-operative Research Centre*. He is also President-elect of the Australian and New Zealand Communications Association, and will host the 2009 ANZCA conference at QUT in July 2009, with the theme of "Communication, Creativity and Global Citizenship".

**Stuart Cunningham** is Professor of Media and Communications, Queensland University of Technology, and Director of the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation ([www.cci.edu.au](http://www.cci.edu.au)). This centre draws on contributions across the humanities, creative arts and social sciences to help build a more dynamic and inclusive innovation system in Australia. He is one of Australia's best known media scholars with a special interest in policy. He has served as a Commissioner of the Australian Film Commission, as foundation Chair of QPIX, Queensland's screen resource centre, and as President of the Council for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences.

**Dr. Axel Bruns** is a Senior Lecturer in the Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia, where he researches the impact of

user-led content creation, or produsage, on media, business, and society. His previous work has focussed especially on the role of produsage in journalism, and the rise of citizen journalism. He is the author of *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life and Beyond: From Production to Produsage* (2008) and *Gatewatching: Collaborative Online News Production* (2005), and the editor of *Uses of Blogs* with Joanne Jacobs (2006; all released by Peter Lang, New York). His blog is at <http://snurb.info/>, and he contributes to the Gatewatching.org group blog with Jason Wilson and Barry Saunders.

**Dr. Jason Wilson** is a lecturer in Digital Media and Communications at the University of Wollongong. He has been project manager and editor of several citizen journalism and e-democracy projects, including Youdecide2007 and GetUp!'s Project Democracy. He is a widely published commentator and scholar in the area of citizen journalism and online public affairs, and as well as refereed publications, he has been published by the ABC, Crikey, New Matilda and On Line Opinion. He contributes to the group blog gatewatching.org with Axel Bruns.

### 3. Background

This submission to the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy's public inquiry into the future of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) responds to the Discussion Paper circulated by the Department and the Minister, Senator Stephen Conroy. It draws upon the research experience of a team of academic researchers based in the Creative Industries faculty at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), and the School of Social Sciences and Media at the University of Wollongong.

We have been involved since February 2007 in an Australian Research Council Linkage-Project titled *Investigating Innovative Applications of Digital Media for Participatory Journalism and Citizen Engagement in Australian Public Communication*. This project, which has investigated the development and future possibilities of *citizen journalism* in Australia, has been developed between QUT and industry partners including the Special Broadcasting Service, Cisco Systems Australia and New Zealand, The National Forum (publishers of the Australian public affairs e-journal *On Line Opinion*) and The Brisbane Institute. The project has investigated the possibility of citizen or peer-to-peer (P2P) journalism promoting greater citizen participation and online deliberative democracy in Australian public policy and the political sphere. The aim was to electronic democracy agendas to innovations in journalism promoted by digital media technologies to prototype emergent forms of political citizenship and public communication in 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia.

The project has had five aims:

1. To investigate the scope for an aggregated citizen journalism site to generate new forms of news, information and comment through an action research framework, developed in the context of the 2007 Australian Federal election;
2. To promote user-created news content in online media sphere, by providing tools and resources that would enable participation by a wide range of interested individuals;

3. To foster the development of online deliberative democracy and policy formation initiatives, particularly where the context of a Federal election could allow for locality-based content or ‘hyper-local’ news that may not be the focus of larger, more nationally-focused news organisations;
4. To promote links between established national media organisations (e.g. SBS) with emergent online public deliberation forums (e.g. Online Opinion) to promote new forms of interaction in online news media space;
5. To research, document and report on innovations in online citizen journalism in Australia and their relationship to wider Web 2.0 developments, both in Australia and internationally.

To this end, we have undertaken two major research activities. The first was an exercise in practice-led research, where a citizen journalism Web site was established for the 2007 Australian Federal election. The site was called *youdecide2007.org*, and was launched in September 2007, attracting 6,000-10,000 unique site visits a week, and over 1000 registered users, in the period leading up to the 24 November 2007 Federal election. It published over 500 unique content items over this time, including print articles, audio and video. The site was publicised in *The Age*, ABC Radio National, various local ABC radio stations, local newspapers and Fairfax Online. Project team members contributed a regular column to the ABC *Unleashed* site titled *Club Bloggery*, and a weekly television program was broadcast for six weeks on Briz 31 community television called *You Decide TV*, which attracted about 12,000 viewers to each episode, as well as being widely downloaded on *You Tube*. More information about the You Decide project can be found in Flew and Wilson (2008a) and Flew and Wilson (2008b). We also developed Queensland Decides ([www.qlddecides.org](http://www.qlddecides.org)), which repeated a similar exercise in relation to the March 2008 Queensland Local Government elections, which received over 10,000 hits in the period from late January-early March 2008.

The second strand of the research has involved working with the Special Broadcasting Service on an audit of their initiatives in the area of *user-created content (UCC)*, an evaluation of staff attitudes and organisational strategies towards UCC, and the development of new digital media initiatives that harness the affordances of UCC in SBS news and current affairs. Ms. Heidi Lenffer undertook a Master of Arts

(Research) through QUT while being based at SBS, undertaking a 15-month action research project that allowed her to be both a participant in and a documenter of attitudes towards UCC in SBS and the challenges that the digital media environment presented to an established national public broadcaster. This thesis was submitted in October 2008, and was supervised by Professor Terry Flew from QUT and Ms. Georgina McClean, Manager, Policy and Research at SBS, and a paper outlining the principal project findings has been presented to the Centre for Media and Communications Law at the University of Melbourne on 20-21 November, 2008 (Flew, Lenffer and McClean 2008).

The key propositions that we wish to develop in this submission are:

1. The question of how national public broadcasters respond to changes in the media environment arising from digitisation, convergence and changing societal needs and expectations can be best understood as a question of *social innovation*;
2. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century digital media environment, where all media outlets are multi-platform and digitised in their modes of content production and delivery, it is better to understand the ABC and SBS as *public service media* organizations, rather than public service broadcasters. This emphasises how it is the services provided, rather than the delivery platforms, that are at the core of rationales for public support of the ABC and SBS;
3. There is considerable scope for both ABC and SBS to enhance and renew their Charter obligation as and social innovation remit through public service media through *user-created content* strategies, particularly in their provision of online services;
4. For the ABC, UCC strategies can make a considerable contribution to its provision of Australian content in news and current affairs, localism and diversity of news and information, particularly through the development of *hyper-local content* that exploits its network of broadcast media outlets throughout Australia and its unique presence in non-metropolitan Australia.
5. For the SBS, UCC presents new opportunities to harness its unique relationship to Australia's diverse ethnic, language and cultural communities and its central role in the provision of international news and information, by



enabling it to diversify its sources of news and other informational content material by reaching beyond the international news agencies to draw upon material sourced from 'pro-am' contributors around the world, and accessed locally through the Internet;

6. The ABC and SBS have the potential to be content innovators in the provision of news and information in ways that utilise UCC strategies, and to play a key role in growing international debates about the future of journalism and news media in an environment where media consumers are participants and content co-creators and not simply passive recipients of news and information. As public service media organizations, they are uniquely placed to enable new UCC opportunities in the online media space while also managing such content sourcing strategies with their policy, legal and Charter obligations, as well as questions of the accuracy and relevance of information, quality and credibility of news content and sources, and identity as highly respected news brands.

#### 4. Social Innovation and Public Service Media

Social innovation is understood as the application of a new idea, or a new application of an existing idea, that delivers lasting social value. Social value refers to the benefits over and above those received by the direct consumer of the product or service, but to the benefits to society as a whole arising from the development, application and use of this new product or service.

Murray, Mulgan and Caulier-Grice (2008) propose that the current era is one where social innovation is driven by two developments. The first is the technological revolution of the Internet and digital ICTs, and ‘the spread of networks and global infrastructure for information and social networking tools’. The second is cultural, and involves ‘the growing emphasis on the human dimension, on putting people first, giving democratic voice and starting with the individual and relationships rather than systems and structures’ (Murray *et. al.* 2008: 2).

The significance of these two trends comes together around two phenomena of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. First, as networks are based around complex, decentralized and distributed systems, it is increasingly the case that *innovation comes from the margins rather than the centre*. This turns traditional innovation systems thinking on its head, as it points to the need for a different role for the state to that of promoting R&D activities in large, centralised public and private sector institutions. Second, the Internet and digital media technologies are associated with what Yochai Bekler (2006) refers to as *social production*, where the traditional distinctions between the market, the state and the individual or household begin to blur and morph, and where the network economy grows through the *co-ordinate effects* of a multiplicity of individual activities and actions that have a diverse range of market and non-market motivations (cf. Shirky 2008). Of particular importance here is the role of the consumer or user as a producer or generator of new content, information, products and services, or as Bruns (2008) refers to as the *produser*.

In his work on the relationship between economics and culture, Throsby (2008) understands cultural goods and services in a parallel way, proposing that in addition

to any commercial value they may possess, cultural goods and services are likely to be 'valued, both by those who make them and by those who consume them, for social and cultural reasons that are likely to complement or transcend a purely economic evaluation. These reasons might include spiritual concerns, aesthetic considerations, or the contribution of the goods and services to community understanding of cultural identity' (Throsby 2008: 219).

Social innovation that generates new forms of social, cultural or other forms of public, non-commercial value may derive from conscious design or multiple, unconscious and unco-ordinated processes. Public service broadcasting (PSB) is a good example of social innovation generated by conscious design. In the classic formulation of PSB developed by Lord Reith as the first Governor of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the aim was to deliberately harness the power of the new mass media for purposes of nation-building, mass education, strengthening of the informational base of liberal democracy, and broadly-based cultural improvement.

Similar principles have informed the Charter of the ABC, and can be found in the Objectives of National Broadcasting listed in the Discussion Paper for this Inquiry of universality, localism, Australian content, comprehensive and diverse programming, diversity of news and information, education, and innovation and quality. Jacka (2004) has persuasively argued that some or all of these can be delivered by commercial, for-profit media and have been at different instances, particularly in the Australian context (e.g. quality Australian drama). It is rather that by building into the media ecology public institutions that have an explicit remit to deliver social, cultural or public value, there is not a dependence upon these being simply the by-product of organizational strategies where the first priority is to maximize commercial value and shareholder returns.

The social innovation remit embedded in the Charter of the SBS is a unique one internationally. Established in the 1970s as a response to the challenges of an increasingly multicultural Australian society, and the lack of responsiveness of Australian media to the growing cultural diversity of society, SBS has become a distinctively Australian initiative 'to bring Australians of different backgrounds together in a constantly evolving multicultural society that values social inclusiveness

and cultural democracy' (Ang *et. al.* 2008: 25). In their recent history of SBS, Ang, Hawkins and Dabboussy describe this contribution in the following terms:

SBS situates specific community interests, ethnic or otherwise, in the wider framework of a public media institution. This means that particular communities inevitably have to acknowledge their co-existence with *other* communities ... One of the great values of a public media institution that takes diversity as its starting point is the ability to include many constituencies and to facilitate cross-cultural communication between them. This means that multicultural public broadcasting is a force for *integration* rather than separateness, bringing together various viewpoints and experiences within a common public sphere (Ang *et. al.* 2008: 6-7 – authors' emphases).

If public broadcasters such as the ABC and SBS have constituted forms of social innovation through conscious institutional design, the rise of the Internet, the World Wide Web and social media (Web 2.0) in its various manifestations represent social innovation arising from the uncoordinated actions of millions of users of online media, harnessed through a networked information and communications infrastructure designed for quite different purposes to those for which many round the globe utilize it. As Yochai Benkler puts it, the rise of the Internet has fundamentally changed the nature of media from a one-to-many system of mass communication, to a system that is increasingly driven by 'non-market production in the information and cultural production sector, organised in a radically more decentralized system than was true for this sector in the 20<sup>th</sup> century' (Benkler 2006: 3). As a result, 'individuals become less passive, and thus more engaged' as 'the various formats of the networked public sphere provide anyone with an outlet to speak, to inquire, to investigate, without need to access the resources of a major media organization' (Benkler 2006: 11).

**The challenge for the ABC and SBS is how to be best positioned as 21<sup>st</sup> century public service media to act as conduits for user-led social innovation while maintaining the core features of their institutional design and Charter remit to deliver social and cultural value through provision of unique and compelling media content that informs, entertain and engages all Australians.**

## 5. Public Service Media and the Architecture of Participation

**We propose that any revision to the Charters of the ABC and SBS shall refer to them as *public service media*, rather than as public service broadcasters, and that they should be described as providing *media services*, and not imply radio and television services.**

This shift towards public service media follows from the rise of online media services. It has been widely discussed in Europe in recent years. Trappel (2008) has observed that ‘the public service remit is not confined to a specific technology (like radio or broadcasting) but to a specific service. PSB therefore has to follow the audience to where they would access such services’ (Trappel 2008: 320).

Coleman (2004), Murdock (2005) and Moe (2008), as well as the UK communications regulator Ofcom (2007) have proposed that online public service media play a vital role in the establishment and maintenance of a *digital commons*. Through public service media as serving a digital commons, citizenship goals related to media such as provision of information, distribution of social knowledge, opportunities for deliberation, guarantees of diversity of representation and maximization of participation and pluralism are institutionally guaranteed in the online environment.

We propose a more ambitious remit for the ABC and SBS than simply recognition - and funding – for their online media activities alongside radio and television. **This is an ideal time for ABC and SBS as public service media to embrace a change in emphasis, and become *participatory public service media* entities that embrace the multiplatform media environment, and harness and encourage the Australian people’s appetite for participatory content creation.** This means that alongside their traditional functions, public service media organizations should begin to emphasise the provision of online *architectures of participation* which offer a digital commons that enables the creative output, information, opinions and stories of the Australian public to be distributed and discussed.

This proposal arises partly out of necessity in the context of a changing 21<sup>st</sup> century media environment, but also from the opportunity to renew the public service media remit for that changing environment, and maintain the ABC and SBS as leaders in social innovation around citizenship goals and the provision of media content of social, cultural and public value.

In its report on the *Participative Web: User-Created Content* (OECD 2007), the OECD identified six major socio-economic impacts of the rise of *user-created content*:

1. Digital content innovations will be less based on traditional R&D strategies, business models and scale and incumbency advantages, and will instead favour new entrants, *decentralized creativity*, organisational innovation and new value-adding models;
2. Traditional content publishers and broadcasters will face *new forms of competition* for audience time, advertising revenue and content sources, as well as audiences/users who will demand ‘any time, any place, any device’ content and will be more inclined to comment on, rank and criticize content;
3. Professional content providers (journalists, photographers, video producers, graphic designers etc.) face new challenges from ‘*pro-am*’ *content producers* through social media sites;
4. Users have a less deferential and passive orientation towards media and information content, as *participation, re-use and remediation become core aspects of the consumption experience*, particularly (but not only) for younger users (Deuze 2006);
5. ‘*Long tail*’ *economics* (Anderson 2006) mean that, as the ‘distributional bottleneck’ to content availability is radically diminished, more diverse and niche-oriented consumption patterns will be revealed, as ‘popularity no longer has a monopoly on profitability’ (Anderson 2006: 24);
6. *Open platform media* means that traditional ‘gatekeeping’ media and information sources co-exist with a plethora of other sources of information and content, meaning that information access and quality control, traditionally managed by government regulators or the industries themselves, are

increasingly becoming the responsibility of user/consumers, posing new challenges to *maintaining reputation and trust*.

Both the ABC and SBS bring considerable strengths to the Web 2.0 environment.

These include:

- Access to Australia's leading media professionals and creative content producers, both within and outside of their organizations;
- Well established profiles in the Australian media environment;
- Trusted brands and a reputation for quality and credibility;
- Deep and lasting relationships of trust with diverse core audiences;
- An informed and engaged audience/user base;
- Extensive archival material that can be digitised and re-purposed;
- Reputations as innovators in media content.

At the same time, there is no longer the need for content producers to seek permission from the established media organisations to have their content distributed, as there was in a limited channel broadcast media environment, nor are audiences reliant upon a relatively small number of information and entertainment sources. Moreover, what Professor Jay Rosen from New York University has referred to as 'the people formerly known as the audience' (Rosen 2007) are using the media tools themselves to produce and distribute stories and information, and engage in conversations about matter of public importance.

The turn to user-created content generates its own dynamic. As people become more aware of what they can do with the new media tools, they choose to make greater use of them. They no longer passively accept what is given to them by media professionals as being in their best interests. Rather, they seek to work with others on generating their own media content and distribution outlets. Charles Leadbeater, in his book *We-Think: Mass Innovation, Not Mass Production*, has described the current era as one where 'the irresistible force of collaborative mass innovation meets the immovable force of entrenched corporate organisation' (Leadbeater 2008). As large public service media organizations, the ABC and SBS are clearly among those facing

the challenge of how to respond to the bottom-up pressures and new challenges associated with the rise of collaborative social production and user-created content.

## **6. User-Created Content and New Opportunities for Social Innovation based on the Public Service Media Remit**

We have argued in this Submission for a renewed focus on the part of public service media to harness and stimulate participatory, user-generated content from the Australian public. Some tentative steps have been taken in this direction by public broadcasters, and examples include Radio National's "Pool project (<http://www.pool.org.au>) and the inclusion in ABC Local Radio sites of some capacity for users to submit their own content. Our public broadcasters also need to be congratulated on the extent to which they have moved to open up news and opinion to public comment, and have begun online forums (like ABC Online's "Opinion" and "Unleashed" sections) where members of the public are able to present longer and more considered viewpoints on issues of public interest. But these attempts have, perhaps, been compromised by their status as "add-ons" to a model that still emphasizes the provision of original content *by practitioners to* an audience. News reporting by professional journalists should not stop, but there is a strong case to be made for providing more thoroughgoing and compelling mechanisms for participation, and more completely allowing users in as members of "content-making" communities.

Public service media must move such efforts from the *margins* of their operations to the *centre*. From being "read-only" broadcasting institutions, they must be transformed into "read-write" media providers that offer a place to the audience as co-creators. This needs to be done not only as a response to the increasing demand from contemporary citizens/users for more participatory models of news and entertainment, but in order for public service media providers to maintain their relevance, and their capacity for innovation into the future. Public service media could and should adapt their underlying principles and objectives for the new century. If they do this successfully will be able to contribute to rebuilding social trust and social capital, building local and national identity, and to preparing Australians for a future in which



the capacity to engage with participatory media technologies will be a crucial part of the toolkit of citizenship. Given their strengths, we believe that public media are well-placed to drive these changes.

Of course, none of this need be at the direct expense of the traditional functions of public broadcasters. Especially in the areas of public affairs journalism and the commissioning of quality broadcast content, the role for public service media in the future will only become more important, as the capacity for commercial media to provide these services diminishes in the face of media fragmentation and declining revenues. But if anything, opening up spaces for local content production to users has the potential for allowing public service media organisations' resources to be more efficiently deployed to strengthening these traditional functions.

For the remainder of this section we use the objectives of public broadcasting as developed in the Acts (and summarized in the *Discussion Paper*) to structure our recommendations as to how and why public service media organizations should enhance their provision for, and use of user-generated content. We rethink these objectives in the light of the possibilities for a new relationship between public service media organizations and their audiences.

*5.1 Universality—enabling all Australians to access broadcasting services, regardless of geography or capacity to pay, to allow them to participate in society and its institutions.*

An emphasis on online provision of architectures of participation will aid in reconceiving the goal of universal access of twenty-first century lines, in ways that contemporary media users have increasingly come to expect. That is – public service media should no longer simply aim for universal access to transmission, or to certain kinds of programming, but should also aim to provide access to platforms for the creativity of users themselves. That means asking them to report on events in their local area using the range of media at their disposal, and foregrounding user-led creativity alongside that of professional journalists and media practitioners.

During the operation of our own citizen journalism services, we encountered a strong appetite for the kind of platform we provided, which allowed citizens to report on and talk about the issues that mattered to them during the most closely watched election campaign of recent times. We received submissions from a wide range of people from all areas of the country, and also attracted a large non-contributing audience of readers. Citizen journalism platforms are not as weightless as some “Web 2.0” boosters would claim – they require professional editorial oversight, and investment in providing staff with specific skill sets around generating content, building networks, engaging user communities, and managing technical provision (Flew and Wilson 2008b).

If public media organizations make it easier for people to access the means for presenting their own stories, speak on the issues that interest them, and exercise their creativity, they would expand Australians’ direct participation in democratic processes, and their investment in political, social and cultural institutions. By providing an alternative to (often-partisan) existing online forums for political participation and debate, public service media organizations would assist in providing a means by which social capital and habits of participation – in the broadest sense – could be strengthened.

### *5.2 Localism—allowing people with similar interests to communicate and participate in local communities.*

Public service media organizations need to embrace a localism that not only provides broadcast content targeted to local communities, but which provides a compelling means by which local community members can communicate directly with one another, and thereby collectively participate in the life of the community. Public service media should not only provide local communities with news and views, but also with the means to represent and constitute themselves by telling their own stories, and publishing their own content.

The affordances of online publishing include not only the capacity for instantaneous global publishing, but also the capacity to provide forms of hyper-local coverage that the limitations of broadcast media do not allow for. Given the resources of the ABC

alone – with its national network of local bureaus – the capacity to harness and stimulate the user-led production could lead to innovative services of global significance. Although local radio currently solicits user-generated content on localized Web pages, in our view they are hampered by poor design and implementation, an unfriendly user experience, and a general neglect. For now, these must be seen as representing a missed opportunity. The online localism of the future must stop seeing community forums as an “add-on” to the work of journalists in local bureaus. Instead, local journalists must begin to see themselves as, in part, curators and facilitators of the community’s own output.

For the ABC in particular, re-imagining local bureaus as hyperlocal content hubs for content created by local communities, and reconceiving them as multiplatform entities presents enormous opportunities. Especially for non-metropolitan areas, where local staff are as focused on facilitating community content as they are on providing original content, there will be a capacity for redressing the “metrocentric” nature of Australia’s media culture, and fostering creativity and the development of human capital on a national scale.

*5.3 Australian content—strengthening Australian identity through the provision of programming that reflects Australia’s unique character and characteristics, and promotes diversity and understanding of other cultures.*

Public media organizations in the broadcast era have been outstanding in creating and selecting content that represents Australia’s character and diversity. In the future, participatory public media needs to operate on the assumption that the best way to facilitate an understanding of Australian identity is to provide a platform by which Australians can tell their own stories, and represent themselves to one another. Along with producing and commissioning Australian content, public service media must provide a means for *Australians* to produce and publish *their* content, and *their* stories.

A new view of the meaning of “Australian content”, then, would consider not only how Australian identity and community diversity is “represented” in broadcast programming, but how public media services might help provide forums where

Australian identity is directly narrated and negotiated by citizens. Our experience of running a citizen journalism service uncovered community views and visions of Australian identity that broadcast mainstream media were not able to accommodate or represent. In particular, the stories of remote communities, disadvantaged groups and minority political groups were able to find expression on Youdecide2007 in a way that more traditional media sources could not match.

Based on these experiences, we believe that the understanding of Australian content must change to accommodate user-created Australian content.

*5.4 Comprehensive and diverse programming—ensuring Australian audiences have access to a comprehensive range of content that is relevant to, and representative of, the range of groups within society.*

We believe that some of the effort at ensuring comprehensive and diverse content should be directed at providing platforms for user created content which are relevant and useful to a wide range of groups in Australian society. Rather than seeking out and “representing” this diversity through reportage, there is the opportunity to provide a platform for people to tell their own, local stories. In this way, representation of the diversity and pluralism of Australian society can emerge from the community’s own creative interactions.

*5.5 Diversity of news and information—ensuring an informed public debate about key issues affecting Australian society and the nation, free from commercial or other interests.*

While national broadcasters have always played a key role in informing public debate with a diversity of news sources, we believe that in the future public broadcasters should take the next step by focusing on providing compelling forums where such debate can take place. In doing this, they will ensure that an even greater diversity of news content can be tapped. Again, this means providing platforms not only for user comments on news stories, but for user-created news and opinion content.

The “always-on” nature of online forums means that debates there can take place at greater length and depth than the “news cycle” and other time constraints of broadcasting allow. User-led news and opinion spaces can also canvass issues that are not part of the agenda of professional journalists and governments, and can gather communities of interest around issues that are not receiving sufficient attention. Making user-created news and opinion content a more central part of the activities of public service media will also mean that a genuine alternative is offered to commercial or partisan online forums for user-created content. Users will benefit from services provided by trusted institutions, and public service media organizations will benefit by remaining central to the national conversation.

*5.6 Education—enhancing the intellectual and creative capacity of Australian society and supporting the development of Australia’s human capital.*

Public service media organizations have always played an educative role in providing high quality information to Australians, but in the future, the objective of education should include more directly encouraging and harnessing the creativity of all Australians by giving them the tools and forums to realize it. Making user-created content more central to the activities of public service media organizations will help by directly fostering the intellectual and creative capacities of all Australians who engage with these services.

When we were running our citizen journalism projects, we were able to contribute to enhancing both the technological literacies of participants, and their ability to create and publish news stories. By offering a training manual and direct assistance to participants, on a small scale we were able to develop human capital and creative capacities. Were this sort of educative role taken up on a national scale by public service media organizations, there would be a significant development in Australia’s human capital.

*5.7 Innovation and quality—providing informative and thought-provoking content that enriches society, and encouraging creative endeavour and the development of new talent.*

We believe that the objectives of innovation and quality are not only still relevant to the public service media organization of the future, but will be even more comprehensively met by an embrace of the creativity of the “people formerly known as the audience”.

As outlined earlier in this submission, we believe that an embrace of user-generated content would take public service media beyond innovation in broadcasting, and into areas of genuine social innovation. In providing architectures of participation, public service media could transcend the idea of benefiting their audience, and play a significant role in transforming Australia and making it more competitive, capable and creative in the cultural and economic mileux of the twenty-first century.

User created content would make public service media more informative. As well as using reportage that selects and summarises as a source of information, public service media could tap the “wisdom of the crowd” by aggregating user-created news and opinion content from around the nation to provide a unique “bottom-up” picture of the nation.

In fostering creative endeavour and new talent, public service media should not stop at the ranks of professional journalists and practitioners, and think about encouraging the creativity and talents of the entire Australian community, by fostering and harnessing that talent in innovative ways.

By reimagining their objectives, and restructuring their activities around user-created content, public service media can maintain their relevance and innovative leadership well into the future.

## **7. New Opportunities for SBS to link Australian Multiculturalism and World News**

A particular opportunity exists for SBS to harness UCC to renovate its commitment to global news and current affairs through UCC. SBS Television was a pioneer in exploiting international satellite news feeds to create a new, globally focused news

service, and this commitment to globalism in its news and current affairs remains one of the most valued aspects of SBS TV (Ang *et. al.* 2008). The challenge it now faces is that as these sources become more readily available to audiences directly through cable or satellite TV or via the Internet, SBS could be seen as providing ‘more of the same’ through an over-reliance upon sources such as CNN, the BBC or Reuters.

Amongst the various forms of user-created content (UGC) now populating the web, blogs serve an important function. In the context of global concentration of news and information sources (Thussu 2007), bloggers are increasingly seen as valuable contributors to news reporting. Niche reporting in individual blogs and loyal readerships around specialist interest areas or particular points of view offer a rich information resource and set of contacts. SBS could develop – particularly in the online space – a potential ‘meta-news-aggregator’, developing an innovative news-gathering model that capitalises on the networks of information that are readily available via the internet and the blogosphere in particular.

SBS could harness its extensive links into Australia’s ethnic communities to develop network of informal specialist ‘reporters’ in the community by creating UCC opportunities around identified countries and topic areas where the users with the appropriate expertise or knowledge areas could respond to an identifiable need. An issue-based, international network could both tap into existing ethnic communities to gather cultural insights, and provide audiences with an opportunity to present their experiences of newsworthy overseas events. These community links could be utilised in the context of issues and events rather than the ad-hoc ‘UGC free-for-all’ found on most online news media sites – the classic “Got a good story? Send us an SMS” model. Acknowledging the reality of limited resources, this strategy would allow SBS to offer the audience an opportunity to influence the news agenda by contributing knowledge on a range of issues in Australia and overseas, and could draw from audiences and contributors caught in the middle of events or conflicts and are able to record the happenings with portable technology.

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