JOURNALISM AND DEMOCRACY.2020

TRANSFORMATIONS IN JOURNALISM RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

RMIT University, 2-4 December 2020

Abstracts

Social media use in Oman: A case study for journalists

Moosa Al Lawati, RMIT University

Keywords: Oman, social media, user generated content, press freedom, journalism education

This paper is part of a larger PhD study on the current trends of social media usage in journalistic practice at the Sultanate of Oman, and it raises questions about the usefulness of User-Generated Content in the daily newsgathering routines in countries with restrictions on journalistic practice.

By focusing on three case studies drawn from Omani social media, this paper discusses the differences in content on social media between citizens' posts and the news from the government owned television station, Oman TV. The study focuses on three major local events, at different aspects, mainly political, social, and economic events.

A content analysis of these posts on social media and on Oman TV has revealed that despite the increasing popularity of social media in Oman, many issues raised on social media are avoided by journalists.

Semi-structured interviews with Oman TV journalists have revealed that it is not just the restrictive policies that hinders reporting, but also a lack of trust in information on social media and a lack of formal editorial guidance for journalists and editors.

This paper concludes by arguing for greater media training in misinformation and verification skills in Oman, but also raises concerns about the ability of Oman journalists to use issues raised on social media because they lack the guaranteed freedom of the press given in other media contexts in the Middle East.

Lessons from the field: Insights from supporting reporting on violence against women during a critical event

Naomi Bailey, Our Watch and Cait McMahon, DART Centre

Keywords: journalism practice, journalism education, trauma

How can we prepare our students for the work of reporting in times of great uncertainty, and when the subject matter is confronting? Language can hide as much as it reveals, shield us as reporters from institutional bias, and consciously or unconsciously reinforce myths that protect privilege. At the intersection of bushfires driven by climate change and a pandemic, we have seen a growing rate of domestic and family violence murders in Australia this past six months. At the same time, the economic turmoil is driving great uncertainty in the media landscape. This session generates ideas for equipping students for managing the tension between better reporting in uncertain times and self care. In this case study, the DART Centre and Our Watch document lessons from the field supporting journalists reporting on the emergency that unfolded in Margaret River when Peter Osmington murdered six family members. It documents the trauma-informed work done with journalists and the community, and the evidence-based work on tackling myths and stereotypes to accurately report violence against women. Insights from this innovative approach are used to generate curriculum interventions ideas for consideration by journalism educators in this session presentation with Q&A to follow.

Towards an understanding of the use of the fake news label in online political discussion: Anti-fandom as a political participatory practice

Dr Renee Barnes, University of the Sunshine Coast

Keywords: fake news, anti-fandom, political communication, Facebook

Fake news has received increasing scholarly attention, however, the majority of this research has focused on fake news as a genre, or the deliberate creation of pseudojournalistic disinformation. The phenomenon of the fake news label, describing the political instrumentalization of the term to delegitimize news media, remains chronically understudied (Egelhofer & Lecheler 2019). The fake news label has fundamental democratic impacts, impeding the public function of journalism, the nature of political discourse, and the democratic process in general (Matthes, Maurer, & Arendt, 2019; Tsfati, 2014). This paper seeks to draw on the theoretical framework of anti-fandom to examine the use of the fake news label within online political debate. Drawing on the theoretical underpinnings of anti-fandom focuses on the affective foundations of political participatory practice in which the

framework of 'against' the opposing ideological position, and those news media seen to represent that position, is used as a rallying point for activism and enthusiasm rather than a particular cause. It will be argued that anti-fandom can provide a perspective through which to examine political debate as a fan-like activity in a wide textual field in which formerly distinct texts, such as news and user-created content, are drawn on to form an image of the fan object – a political perspective and the media associated with that perspective. Drawing on an ethnographic study of Facebook news commenters, the paper will argue that conceptualising emotive, regular, and partisan engagement in online political discourse as anti-fandom shifts the focus from problems about 'which news is real' to 'which news we choose to believe'. Likewise, polarised discussion may be understood as less about the issue debated and more about the affective positioning of that individual, established by the paratexts they used to create an understanding of a particular topic or opposing perspective.

Responsible journalism in a public health crisis – the global challenge of COVID-19

Catriona Bonfiglioli, University of Technology Sydney

Keywords: COVID, coronavirus, journalism, public health, media logic, agenda setting, framing

The SARS-COV-2 pandemic is the hottest health news topic since the height of the HIV crisis. Its news value is demonstrated by steep rises in coverage - a Factiva search shows Australian news outlets published almost 4000 stories using the words "COVID" or "coronavirus" in January, about 13,000 in February, 76,000 articles in March and 77,000 in April. Coverage peaked in May around 78,000 and fell in June to just over 62,000 articles. But, in the first week of July, more than 15,370 articles were published, taking coverage back to levels seen in early June. The curve of coverage is flattening but the impact of the second wave in Victoria is yet to be confirmed. The pandemic shapes the environment in which journalists are working today. Around the world, more journalists are working as health reporters with varying degrees of expertise, contacts, and experience. Politicians and public health officials are having to align with media logic to harness the power of and trust in news media to convey urgent, complex, and changing public health messages to fearful and vulnerable people (Hinnant et al. 2017). Journalists are grappling with public health logic to inform their reporting, choose their sources, frame the issue for the public and grapple with vested interests, secrecy, and misinformation. While the news is not primarily a public health information service, journalism is expected to serve the public interest: "Its first loyalty is to citizens" (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014). Health news can shape health decisions including uptake of vaccination and tests for diseases such as breast cancer and for genetic predispositions to disease (Bonfiglioli 2007; Walsh-Childers 2016). This means a higher degree

of responsible communication is necessary when reporting on the pandemic. This paper explores responsible journalism in a public health crisis using COVID-19 as a case study.

From faith to fans – a two year visual representation journey for the Tongan National Rugby League team in the Australian news media

Margaret Cassidy, University of Tasmania

Keywords: visual representation, migrant representation, qualitative content analysis, photojournalism

While increasing numbers of young men from Tongan and other Pacific Islander communities are professional sportsmen playing in both rugby codes, there have only been two international rugby league matches played between the Tongan and Australian national teams – in 2018 and 2019. Representing Tonga were a group of players with current contracts in the Australian National Rugby League competition who are either recent migrants or of Tongan descent.

As a group of professional sportsmen playing in a competition predominantly based in Australia, their visual representation is ordinarily focussed on what Gina Hawkes (2018) has described as "hyper-masculinity", body strength and size and skills. They are fast, agile, big, and what Andrew Grainger (2009) has called "childlike", part of what he calls the 'cult of Pacific primitivism'. While this is problematic in terms of its impact on younger Pacific Islander youth in particular, the use of this stereotype in sports news reporting is widespread. However, the Australian news media coverage of the first international match introduces a new and quite different visual representation, that of a group of diaspora players engaging in the emotionally moving traditional Tongan dance accompanied by chant, the Sipi Tau. These images reinforce the "otherness" of these players of Tongan descent.

This paper uses qualitative content analysis based on the content discourse analysis work of Gunther Kress & Theo van Leeuwen (2006) and social semiotic approach of Monika Bednarek & Helen Caple (2017) to address the research question as to whether this visual representation in news stories across these two international matches reinforces or creates a new Pacific Island frame in the Australian news media and is this a post-colonial representation?

Digital and entrepreneurial, democratizing Latin American journalism

Antonio Castillo, RMIT University

Keywords: digital journalism, entrepreneurial journalism, Latin American journalism, independent journalism

Historically the Latin American commercial mainstream media have been a tool of ideological and political power exercised by the commercial and political elite. Historically it has been deeply undemocratic and reactionary. It has defended the class interest of the powerful and has been an instrument of oppression and demonization of the Latin American progressive political and social movement.

For large part of Latin American history, the hegemony of the commercial media went unchallenged. No more though. Latin America has become a fertile ground for progressive and innovative digital native and entrepreneurial journalism projects. They are projects that are not democratising the Latin America landscape, but they are also producing probing, independent and quality journalism.

This paper conference will examine the gestation, evolution and journalistic practice of this new expressions of Latin American journalism. It will also examine their financial models and sustainably as well as the considerable political obstacles and challenges they experience.

Beyond the Black/White dichotomy: Exploring reportage and commentary in Asian-Australian media on Indigenous constitutional recognition

Dr Huck Ying Ch'ng and Kashifa Aslam, RMIT University

Keywords: Indigenous Voice, constitutional recognition, Asian-Australian media reporting, Indigenous-settler relations

The historical importance of Indigenous-European relations in Australia has resulted in a dominant 'Black/White' paradigm in discussions around Indigenous issues such as constitutional recognition. However, given the significant proportion of non-White, non-Indigenous voters in any referendum to enshrine an Indigenous Voice to Parliament or similar change to the Australian Constitution, it is more important than ever to consider the views of all citizens on "the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands" (Referendum Council, 2017). This study attempts to gauge relative levels of interest in Indigenous constitutional recognition amongst Asian Australians through a study of media reportage and commentary related to the release of the Uluru Statement in 2017. The study of mainstream English media and Chinese, Indonesian and Urdu language media in Australia reveals significant differences in the levels of engagement as evidenced in the number of articles found using keywords related to the Uluru Statement across a six-month period. Further ongoing study reveals nuances in the views found in different publications on

indigenous issues in general across a wider timeframe. This study forms part of a larger research project addressing engagement with and by Asian Australians in the contemporary Australian public sphere.

Reporting on war: Press Gallery interactions with Australian Prime Ministers, 1941-2013

Dr Caryn Coatney, University of Southern Queensland

Keywords: Canberra Parliamentary Press Gallery, Prime Ministers, journalism, war and terrorism

The Canberra Parliamentary Press Gallery has long been the centre of national debates over whether journalists are reporting independently for public audiences. The debates have escalated during the news coverage of Australia's longstanding role in terror-related conflicts. In particular, critics have charged that many journalists have not fulfilled their roles as watchdogs to hold political leaders to account during Australia's extensive military interventions overseas. More recently, scholars have acknowledged journalists' growing willingness to present increasingly nuanced reporting of Australia's role in international conflicts. This paper seeks to answer the question: how has the press gallery portrayed the prime ministerial messages of terrorism between World War II and Australia's longest conflict, the war in Afghanistan?

This study focuses on the press gallery's interviews of the prime minister during the period from John Curtin in World War II to Julia Gillard during the conflict in Afghanistan. The study argues that Press Gallery journalists initially focused on upbeat messages and personality profiles of Curtin, as well as of Robert Menzies when he was Prime Minister during the Vietnam War.This style of reporting continued with the media coverage of John Howard and Kevin Rudd during Australia's military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Drawing on the theory of the public sphere, the study finds that press gallery journalists gradually departed from the stage-managed photo opportunities. The journalists involved public audiences in more national debates over the meaning and value of the war. Public discourse and citizen contributions to the news became more influential in shaping the press gallery coverage of war and terrorism.

Feminist Digital Media Politics in Latin America: A Counterhegemonic Gender Activism Space.

Francisca Diaz de Valdes, RMIT University

Key words: Latin America, gender justice, democracy, media activism, digital media, discourse political activism

New technology has become a fundamental tool in the emergence of a political feminist digital narrative across Latin America (LA). I suggest that LA feminist journalists -"Femi-journalists"- (Rovetto 2018), use digital media platforms as instruments of gender activism to achieve socio-political change and gender democracy. In the context of advancing anti-rights policies by conservative governments (Torres 2019), these platforms provide opportunities to defend freedom and further women's civil-political and human rights. Femi-journalists are journalists and militants of the LA feminist movement who "make their practices a professional and activist exercise" (Rovetto 2018,99). They work, communicate and militate virtually (Fernandez 2016). Femi-journalists have created media platforms to circulate narratives in line with the feminist political agenda and ethic. These narratives reflect a counter-hegemonic character resulting from their militant activities (Janz 2020). Femi-journalist produce journalistic content using a gender perspective focus as an analytical and political transformative tool to make visible gender differences (Muntané 2019).

Feminist media projects engage with a particular set of professional practices that look to subvert the androcentric dominant media thinking. They work in transregional-collaborative virtual bases to bring to light their stories. Feminist projects promote independent journalism and a diverse media industry across LA. The purpose of this project is to explore LA feminist media platform discourses as a form of discursive political activism, and its impact on gender justice. The research also focuses on the online and offline impact of this media in areas of public debates and policy formation. This research seeks to systematise the feminist journalistic set of practices. Finally, I would suggest the development of a fresh approach to news content in LA journalism. A number of digital projects will be selected. The aim is to understand how LA feminist journalists imbue their narratives with notions of gender, power and ideology. This project will implement methods with a feminist perspective using the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Lazar 2005). Additionally, the methods of in-depth interviews with femi-journalists and surveys will be used to identify journalistic practices.

Post-Covid, post-industrial journalism? Institutional perspectives on the deterioration of news media ecosystems in Australia

Harry Dugmore, University of the Sunshine Coast

Keywords: Journalism Studies, institutionalism, audience studies, philanthropic funding, crowdsourcing, media economics, creative commons, New Institutional Economics

As the number of 'news deserts' or near news deserts grows in Australia, institutional perspectives from a variety of disciplines can help explain why news media, and particularly regional and local media, have often been reactive and resistant to change. News organisations are often enmeshed in sets of institutional norms that limits their conception of their audiences to content recipients and which keeps them in legal formats and administrative practises that make it hard to solicit donations and grants. This paper examines why 'organisational ambidexterity' is so elusive in the news industry in terms of embracing new business and revenue models, and what forms of deinstitutionalisation are happening, and might be necessary, to revive and sustain local and specialised journalism in Australia.

Drawing on a number of strands of institutional theory and scholarship, the paper also explores what kinds of 'reinstitutionalisation' of journalism might be emerging. These strands include the path dependency perspectives of historical institutionalism, newer traditions of discursive institutionalism that help make sense of journalism's preoccupation with 'paradigm repair' even while revenues plummet, and on a New Institutional Economic (NIE) focus on intellectual property and contracts as a means of creating more flexible modes of operating.

Via these perspectives, this paper looks at various 'green shoots' where hybrid philanthropic-seeded/crowd-funded, more audience-engaged journalism, based on more flexible intellectual property regimes, and distributed through innovative digital and social media dissemination modes, is emerging in Australia. It does this via case studies of three arguably 'post-industrial' news organisations, Crickey Inq, the investigative unit of pioneering online new site Crickey; Croaky, a new 'social journalism about health' news organisation and website; and The Conversation (Australia).

Time well spent: ABC journalists reflect on slow journalism and the Remote Communities Project

Janet Fulton and Paul Scott, University of Newcastle

Keywords: slow journalism, ABC, remote communities, journalism practice

Slow journalism has developed over more than a decade in reaction to the typically fast-paced journalism that is prevalent in mainstream media. Introduced in 2007 by Susan Greenberg, the slow journalism movement encompasses attributes such as deep, non-sensational storytelling, transparency, participatory involvement, community service and ethical practice. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) foray into slow journalism over the last several years via the Remote Communities Project (RCP) has expanded the typical understanding of the concept. While slow journalism is primarily published in alternative

media outlets, other organisations, such as the ABC, have taken the tenets of the movement and moulded the ideas to suit their specific circumstances as a publicly funded body.

The ABC's RCP is an ongoing initiative developed in 2017 to fund new positions and equipment to bolster multimedia reportage of remote, rural and regional areas throughout the nation. The slow journalism project, funded under the RCP banner, enables reporters to travel and spend time in a remote or rural community and find what the project management team call 'the untold stories'. Reporters are provided with the opportunity to spend up to two weeks in a community and engage with that community to develop stories that will be delivered via a variety of platforms.

Fifteen journalists, producers and managers from the ABC who participated in the RCP were interviewed about their experiences. When these participants were asked about their understanding of slow journalism, several themes emerged: the change in practice; the importance of community engagement; and the ability to invest time in finding and developing stories. This presentation will report on those themes to develop a better understanding of how reporters who work under the umbrella of the ABC's RCP view the process of slow journalism and its implications for journalistic practice.

Covid19 and the rise of global investigative journalism

Dr Amanda Gearing, Independent researcher

Keywords: Covid19, investigative reporting, international collaboration, democracy, politics

The release of a novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China in late 2019 caused dual world health and economic crises. News about the deadly risk of the virus was suppressed initially, allowing infected people to carry the virus via international airline flights to all five continents before China notified the international community in early 2020. The health and economic impacts have been far-reaching, triggering mass deaths and a global recession of a magnitude compared with the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Journalists reporting on the virus and the health and economic impacts of the virus worked from a position of isolation lockdown themselves and had to quickly develop international investigative journalism skills to collaborate with reporters around the world. Covid19 thus provided a real-world exemplar of why journalists around the globe need to be well-connected as a profession with other reporters across states, countries and continents to be able to accurately report on this and other crises.

Reporters sourced international data to inform readers of the emerging health risks of Covid19 and potential treatments; as well as the economic risks and how international leaders

and their governments provided income supports to mitigate government isolation regulations.

Covid19 coverage has provided residents of all countries with a unique opportunity to see the response of their own government and leaders with the response of other international governments and leaders. Citizens have watched the unfolding dual international disasters and simultaneously, the variation in governmental and leadership responses. For perhaps the first time in history, world citizens have been presented with data that has enabled them to assess the adequacy of their system of government and their leaders and governments in responding in real time to a deadly health crisis and a simultaneous crippling economic crisis.

What works where and why? Has coronavirus changed the template for reporting?

Dr Chrisanthi Giotis, Centre for Media Transition, University of Technology Sydney

Keywords: constructive journalism, journalism practice, COVID-19

This year has seen an increased interest in the concept of solutions-oriented, or constructive, journalism. The pandemic added weight to those arguing news audiences are buckling under the strain of disaster focused news – that, in fact, audiences also need to see ways forward. These arguments were made by both academics and industry. Guardian head of membership, Mark Rice- Oxley is reported as stating that his organisation upped their constructive journalism output from 2- 3 stories a week to 2-3 stories a day (Green 2020).

One way constructive journalism is practiced is to focus on things that work in other countries, bringing stories of success elsewhere into local news bulletins as a type of transnational learning and source of inspiration (Haagerup 2019, pp. 75-6). Given the global nature of the coronavirus crisis, and the variety of ways in which nations have responded to the health and economic crises, this seems like a key opportunity to apply this form of constructive journalism. In Australia where one- third of the population was born overseas, the opportunity to compare and contrast in a constructive way is even higher.

This paper will report on new content analysis research examining the use of a transnational perspective by proponents of solutions journalism overseas and by mainstream Australian news media. Content will be analysed both qualitatively, in terms of how this type of transnational perspective journalism is practiced and quantitatively, in terms of how frequently it appears in mainstream coverage.

Reducing stigma and supporting help-seeking behaviour through safe communications on alcohol and other drugs

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Keywords: harm-reduction, alcohol and other drugs, public health, media guidelines, communication and journalism, tertiary education

Media plays a considerable role in shaping public beliefs and attitudes regarding alcohol and other drugs (AOD). Subsequently, a key approach to addressing stigma and increasing help-seeking is to consider how journalists, and their sources, communicate about AOD.

As with other health issues such as suicide, public attitudes and beliefs can have a significant impact on individuals who use AOD and influence their ability to engage in help-seeking behaviour or prevent associated harms. Drug and alcohol use disorders, for instance, are one of the most common comorbid factors associated with intentional self-harm, with harmful alcohol use a risk factor for both suicide attempts and death by suicide.

Mindframe for Alcohol and Other Drugs, managed by Everymind, have been trialling the provision of guidelines and training to media, communications students and those who inform the media in a world-leading pilot study. This pilot extends the reach of the Mindframe strategy to include guidelines, training and support on communicating safely, respectfully and responsibly about AOD in a way that minimises harm and encourages help-seeking.

This presentation will discuss the preliminary data from this pilot, with particular focus on the application and impact for journalism students in the tertiary setting. The presentation will also give attendees the opportunity to have input into the next steps of this world-leading research.

Bridging the gulf between Marxist journalism and the Fourth Estate? Chinese journalism students in Australia

Louisa Lim and Lucy Smy, University of Melbourne

Keywords: journalism, journalism education, China, journalism in China, constructive journalism, propaganda, democracy, media freedom, four theories of the press.

The current state of press freedom in China is the worst in decades as the state tightens its control and imposes an increasingly Marxist model of journalism. In this context, we examine the experiences of mainland Chinese students coming to study journalism in Australian universities to interrogate their understandings of journalism. Through a longitudinal survey of Chinese journalism students at the University of Melbourne, we track their experience of navigating the increasing disconnect between the Marxist journalism practiced in China and the traditions and methods of western liberal journalism being taught at Australian universities. The theory of the 'fourth estate' - journalists who hold governments to account, informing citizens and supporting democracy - has underpinned the traditions of western journalism for 250 years. This research explores the relevance of the fourth estate to Chinese journalism students, both as a philosophical question and as a pedagogical tool in aiming to find ways to better support students to overcome that journalistic gulf.

Reshaping the world's media: Is the future for global media one of Chinese patronage and influence?

Louisa Lim, Melbourne University

Johan Lidberg, Monash University

Julia Bergin, Melbourne University

Keywords: journalism, China, global media outreach, global journalism, unions, journalism unions, propaganda, media freedom, four theories of the press

Chinese President Xi Jinping's 2013 directive to "tell China's story well" has come to encapsulate the Chinese Communist Party's international strategy to redress global imbalances in "discourse power" by tackling what they see as the hegemony of the Western media. We have seen previous attempts to re-balance global media power and narratives from both the former Soviet Union and its predecessor the Russian Federation, but the scale and reach of Chinas global media re-balancing project is unprecedented. This research aims to examine the ways in which Beijing is unrolling its outreach campaign aimed at international journalism union and global journalists. Through a survey of 58 journalism unions, carried out for the International Federation of Journalists, this research shows how Beijing is using journalistic tours, content-sharing agreements, media acquisitions and memoranda of understanding to promote official Chinese views and "telling China's story well". This research uses a mixed-methods approach, including online surveys and focus groups in three countries, to examine the scope and successes of China's strategy. The findings are analysed and discussed using the four theories of the press (Siebert et al, 1963). It is interesting to note

that with the rise of China as the new potential leading super power, the role of media in authoritarian political systems first formulated in 1956 (ibid), is again coming to prominence.

A collaborative art: Making The Last Voyage of the Pong Su

Siobhan McHugh, University of Wollongong

Keywords: narrative podcast, audio storytelling, podcast production

Long-form print journalists are increasingly using the narrative podcast format to showcase complex investigative journalism. In the US, the New Yorker's Patrick Raddon Keefe (Wind of Change) and Ronan Farrow (The Catch and Kill) and the New York Times' Rabbit Hole, 1619, and Caliphate are exemplars of the form, while in Australia, The Age's major narrative podcasts, Phoebe's Fall (2016), Wrong Skin (2018) and The Last Voyage of the Pong Su, have all won gold at New York Radio Festival, among a slew of other awards. Besides rigorous research, a common denominator of these hit podcasts is a specialist production team, commissioned to implement best practice audio storytelling and aid the transition from print.

But what do these team members actually do? Which skillsets produce the best synergies? And how does the collaborative process unfold?

Using The Last Voyage of the Pong Su as case study, this paper unpacks this ten-episode narrative podcast from first concept and pre-production to determination of narrative structure, sound design and script. The author worked as consulting producer on all three Age podcasts, advising on optimising storytelling through sound. Methodologically, the paper draws on post-production script iterations, ethnographic observation, textual analysis and semi-structured interviews with the production team: host Richard Baker, executive producer Rachael Dexter, narrative consultant Kate Cole-Adams and head of audio, Tom McKendrick. Conceptually it draws on radio production studies, literary journalism studies and the rapidly growing field of podcasting studies.

International reporting of the Global South, sponsored by Australian philanthropy

Professor Colleen Murrell, Dublin City University

Keywords: media philanthropy, international newsgathering, Global South, foreign correspondence, Australia, Indonesia, Pacific

Australia is not a country that is generally well disposed towards charitable handouts, unless they are associated with one-off rescue efforts – such as bushfire appeals or payment for

flood damages. It is certainly not a country where governments will happily hand over money to failing business models or unsteady startups. According to a 2016 study of media ownership (Noam et al), Australia's media are among the most concentrated in the world and becoming worse and government funding of public service media, such as the ABC and SBS has been cut severely. International reporting has been particularly badly hit, with most media shuttering or closing their foreign bureaux, leaving just a handful with overseas correspondents. Therefore, the sudden entry onto the scene two years ago of 'a philanthropist bearing $100m' (Digital News Report, 2019) was a great fillip for an embattled industry. The Judith Neilson Institute for Journalism and Ideas (JNI) has since announced some bold measures to strengthen reporting on a number of fronts, including of international newsgathering in the Global South.

The JNI has come to the aid of foreign correspondence by enabling the Australian Financial Review to reopen its Jakarta bureau, the Guardian to hire a Pacific editor and develop a network of local, Pacific journalists, and the Australian to produce a series of longform features on the Chinese diaspora. This paper uses qualitative interviewing and content analysis to explore these three case studies and to ascertain their value for readers. Content analysis will test how the chosen media have fulfilled their briefs. And interviews with editors, reporters and philanthropy experts will provide analysis on how notions of success are perceived and rewarded in the philanthropy business. Some of the most interesting themes uncovered concern issues of independence, transparency and sustainability. Others are clustered around challenges to traditional foreign correspondence and new skills exchanges in South East Asia and the Pacific.

How does Guardian Australia tell Indigenous stories? A content analysis of coverage, 2018-2020

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Lisa Waller, RMIT University

David Nolan, University of Canberra

Kerry McCallum, University of Canberra

Keywords: Indigenous media, boundary-drawing power, open journalism, amplification, participation, digital media

Guardian Australia has made a strong commitment to covering Indigenous affairs, offering an alternative approach to other mainstream Australian news media since its establishment in 2013. This commitment has been recognised in recent years, with the digital news platform

winning two Walkley Awards for the data-driven, multimedia journalism projects 'Deaths inside' and 'The killing times'. In this paper, Chadwick and Collister's concept of 'boundary-drawing power' provides a framework for analysing how Guardian Australia negotiates, extends and retracts its professional journalistic ground in key areas in ways that may support more diversity in news-making in the space of Indigenous affairs. In doing so, this paper looks beyond Guardian Australia's award-winning journalism to its 'everyday' reporting of Indigenous affairs. Through a content analysis of 1048 items published between March 2018 and February 2020, the paper identifies and discusses who contributes or produces the content, the types of content and the kinds of topics or stories that are covered, and how Guardian Australia itself categorises or groups these stories. Our analysis finds that Guardian Australia's coverage does provide more sustained and diverse coverage of Indigenous affairs than legacy news outlets have historically provided. The study also establishes a baseline from which to gauge further developments and innovations in Indigenous reporting at Guardian Australia.

Understanding how journalistic practice shaped public knowledge of the Great Barrier Reef: A discourse analysis of central Queensland media clippings from 2007-2017

Maxine Newlands and Ann Roebuck, James Cook University

Keywords: Great Barrier Reef, journalism history, central Queensland, regional mastheads

Fishing, zoning and the politicization of the Great Barrier Reef were the key themes identified in study of over 3000 central Queensland newspaper clippings (2007-2017). The clippings were curated by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Mackay communication managers. Our thematic analysis identified key journalistic drivers, framing and influencing factors that inform public knowledge of the GBR.

We identified 14 different themes in the reporting. Conservation, fishing (including zoning) and the Reef were the three main drivers. Port development and tourism stories were more prominent than mining and infrastructure pieces. Climate change was a low priority despite there being two major bleaching events during the ten years of clippings. Our sample includes News Corp Ltd, APN and Independent mastheads.

With the assistance of the 2019 JERRA research grant, we digitised the clippings, and ran a discourse analysis. This paper presents the findings and its significance in understanding how historically journalism has shaped our knowledge of the Great Barrier Reef and related journalism and communication practices. This project is part of a wider study looking at the role of regional newspapers and Reef reporting.

The audience 'funnel': Social media editors and subscription news

Tai Neilson, Macquarie University

Keywords: journalism, data, audience, subscription

As more online news is moved behind paywalls news staff are tasked with moving audiences down the "funnel." At the wide end of the funnel audience members may click on a news article or interact with news content in their social media feeds. As they move down the funnel, they spend more time on a news organization's webpage or become return visitors. News organizations increasingly need audience members to reach the thin end of the funnel by becoming, and continuing to be, paid subscribers. Social media editors are at the heart of these efforts in their role as intermediaries between audiences and newsrooms. They are integrating data from social networking platforms and data services into editorial practices. Digital platforms and online news have made the process of constructing an audience more quantitative and granular. As such, demographic data are used to profile and target audience segments. Furthermore, behavioral data such as "engaged time" and "return visits" are used to measure and audience attentiveness and loyalty. These analytics are then communicated to reporters and used to shape news production. In this paper, I report on eleven interviews that were conducted with social media editors at news organizations across the US in 2019. I argue that social media editors are refining and implementing a new metrics regime that is closely aligned with the changing economics of online news.

Employment precarity in Australian journalism and the rise of freelance careers

Penny O'Donnell and Beate Josephi, University of Sydney

Keywords: freelance journalism, journalism practice, Australian journalism history

Professional journalists are commonly defined by media scholars as those who earn most of their income from paid newsroom work, a definition that wrongly suggests freelancers are not 'real' journalists. Yet, many more journalists are now turning to freelancing because there are fewer jobs for them in media companies. In 2020 alone, Buzzfeed Australia and Ten Daily closed down; News Corp Australia cut hundreds of jobs following its 'digital-only' restructure; Australian Community Media stood down its workforce after halting operations, while the ABC news division lost 70 staff and Nine Entertainment's top news/caff programs lost 10 reporters, both to cost-cutting. This paper shares the main findings on current modes of freelance journalism work identified from research based on about 30 interviews with

freelancers working for different platforms in metropolitan and regional areas. It argues freelancing should be approached conceptually and practically as a new type of professional career path as it is replacing continuing, salaried newsroom employment. To conclude, it offers a critical discussion of the longstanding scholarly neglect of freelancers in the Australian literature (albeit with notable exceptions), and proposes future research would do well to focus on factors shaping freelance working conditions, editorial output, and professional identity.

Hold the line: Philippine news outlets' social media resistance against Duterte's axe to press freedom

Kara Ortiga, Independent Researcher

Keywords: Duterte, Philippines, press freedom, media, Twitter

By 2019, roughly three years after Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte first sat in office, a total of 154 incidents of threats against the Philippine media was recorded, which included the killing and arrests of journalists, online harassment, and libel cases (Tablong, 2019). Duterte's vitriol against the press, evident in his rhetoric, raged even further when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the region (Sochua, 2020). On May 2020, one of the country's largest broadcast networks, ABS- CBN, was forced to go offline for failure to renew their franchise (Malindog-Uy, 2020). On June 2020, Rappler CEO Maria Ressa is convicted for cyber libel, and not long after, the "Anti- Terrorism Bill" was passed into law, allowing the arrests of anyone performing "acts of terrorism" including provocation of the government (Gutierrez & Paddock, 2020). The fear among journalists is that such political moves have allowed Duterte's administration to further their attacks against the media, marking what many see as the final axe to press freedom (Coronel, 2020). Despite these significant threats, news companies like Rappler and ABS-CBN continue to report the news online. This research selects Rappler and ABS-CBN as case studies, and examines the forms of resistance enacted by these media companies on social media, particularly on Instagram and Twitter, in the backdrop of Duterte's targeted threats against the press. The research conducts a textual analysis of Rappler and ABS-CBN's content on social media within the timeframe of Duterte's announcement of the lockdown on Metro Manila on March 15, 2020 up until present, to explore what how news outlets actively oppose Duterte's threats by using social media to voice out their stand.

How COVID-19 remote working regimes increased the potency and content of online trauma threats

Amantha Perera, Central Queensland University

Keywords: safety, online trauma threats, censorship, press freedom, COVID-19

The remote working regimes imposed by COVID-19 heightened the potency and content of online trauma threats faced by journalists and created unsafe work environments hindering timely production of professional journalism. Online trauma threats are web-based dangers including but not limited to threats, abuse, trolling and fakes that undermine the mental wellbeing and safety of journalists. This paper will examine how online trauma threats increased in potency and content during the COVID-19 lockdowns, and how their combined impact undermined professional journalism.

Online platforms were elevated to indispensable resources for news gathering, reportage, dissemination and audience interaction during the COVID-19 remote working regimes. During this adjusted reporting environment, journalists found themselves interacting primarily through an electronic interface for news gathering, reportage, dissemination and audience engagement. It was a frontline with a 24/7 presence and where multiple trauma threats from professional to personal combined and converged (Perera, 2020).

Even before the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, anecdotal evidence and research had shown that journalists lacked the skills to effectively identify and mitigate online trauma threats (Yates, 2020). My ongoing post-graduate research has established that the impact of this lack of skills accentuated during the COVID-19 crisis hindering the production of professional journalism and increasing the dangers on the journalists' mental wellbeing and by extension on their physical safety (Perera, 2020).

As journalism deals with the long term impact of COVID-19, we will witness the pivot to online resources for journalism remain high (Perera, 2020). As such, there is an urgent need for focused research on online trauma threats faced by journalists and enhancement of skills to mitigate against these dangers (Wescott, 2019). This paper will report on my ongoing research into the impact of online trauma threats on journalists during the COVID-19 lockdowns, their characteristics and the importance of skills training on online trauma threats. It will also explore how these threats could have affected the quality of the journalism produced during the lockdowns.

Reporting in regional communities in times of crisis: A Mindframe approach

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Keywords: suicide prevention, journalism, media guidelines, crisis communication, COVID-19

The role of journalists and media outlets in regional and remote communities is crucial, especially when responding at the time of a crisis. Mindframe recognises the unique needs of regional communities and media outlets in regards to communicating about mental health and suicide prevention. This presentation will look at case studies from regional communities across the country and showcase how collaborative relationships between media and health professionals assist at time of crisis.

There is extensive literature linking poor media reporting of suicide with increased suicide rates. For over two decades Mindframe, managed by Everymind, has provided national leadership through evidence-based guidelines supporting safe media reporting, portrayal and communication about suicide and mental ill-health; and more recently alcohol and other drugs. Mindframe's regional approach, also known as 'Mindframe Plus' has been developed to support regional and rural areas to be better prepared ahead of suicides or clusters to support communities, minimise potentially risky coverage and promote help-seeking pathways.

A key component of the Mindframe Plus approach is the consideration of how suicide and suicide prevention is communicated with regional communities by locally based, state and national media organisations. The training encourages local organisations and sectors to build collaborative relationships with local and state media to promote safe and accurate suicide prevention messages. This presentation looks at case studies of these collaborative relationships in action, including during times of crisis such as flooding and bushfires and with relevance to the current pandemic.

What the Federal Court's decision on the ABC raid case means for press freedom

Matthew Ricketson, Deakin University and Denis Muller, University of Melbourne

Keywords: press freedom, ABC, AFP raids, national security, confidential sources

In late 2019 the Federal Court rejected the ABC's appeal against the Australian Federal Police raid on its Sydney headquarters in search of documents about a story broadcast by the ABC. The raid came soon after the surprise win by the coalition government in the May 2019 federal election though it concerned stories broadcast on the 7.30 program two years beforehand. The stories were about alleged war crimes committed by Australian troops in Afghanistan in 2012. The argument in court turned on whether in the eyes of the judge national security was more important than protecting a journalist's confidential sources. Justice Wendy Abraham not only put more weight on the former but in her judgement put so little store in the need for journalists to protect confidential sources that it imperils the protections won by advocates of press freedom in a range of shield laws around the country.

This judgement has received little media or public attention but its implications for press freedom are alarming. This paper will set out the case and its implications.

Levelling the Playfield? Digital platforms and the News Media Bargaining Code

Angela Romano, Queensland University of Technology

This paper explores the development of a mandatory code of conduct to address bargaining power imbalances between Australian news media businesses and two digital platforms, Google and Facebook, and its potential to make a meaningful contribution to the economic viability of Australia's news media journalism organisations and their ability to create quality journalism. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's 2019 Digital Platform Inquiry recommended that designated digital platforms would 'provide codes of conduct governing relationships between digital platforms and media businesses'. Google and Facebook commenced drafting voluntary codes, but in April 2020, at a time of closures and downsizing of numerous Australian news media organisations, the Federal Government directed the ACCC to draft a mandatory news media bargaining code. The code would address the disparity in bargaining power between digital platforms and news media organisations and its impact on the sharing of advertising revenue, data and other significant resources.

The paper draws from public submissions to the ACCC; responses of Google, Facebook and news media stakeholders; and Facebook and Google's reactions to law and policy aimed at addressing similar problems in Europe and other markets. Google and Facebook have demonstrated enormous ability to shape industry expectations and protocols, to coerce rightsholders to work within the platforms' own systems, and to change their own practices and products to evade laws that are not in their interests. In this light, the paper explores the complexities of addressing the imbalances through bilateral negotiation between digital media platforms and individual news media businesses, or even collective bargaining between platforms and the combined forces of multiple news media industry entities, in a smaller nation such as Australia.

Development and overview of new guidelines for media reporting on mental illness in the context of violence and crime

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Despite its rare occurrence, severe mental illness is commonly linked to violence and crime in the news media. There is sufficient evidence that exposure to the media can influence attitudes and behaviours towards people with mental illness. To reduce harmful effects of reporting, this research aimed to develop best practice guidelines for media reporting on mental illness in the context of violence and crime. Best practice was determined through the Delphi expert consensus method where experts rated statements according to importance for inclusion in the guidelines. In this study, the experts represented three groups: people with lived experience of severe mental illness, media professionals, and mental health professionals. The 77 statements that were endorsed as 'important' or 'essential' by 80% or more of experts were included in the guidelines, while 36 items were rejected from inclusion. There was a high degree of consensus among stakeholder groups. These guidelines expand on existing media guidelines, elaborating on accurate portrayals and appropriate language, and extending coverage to areas of mental health literacy for journalists, considering the impact of media reports on news consumers, reporting relevant risk factors, using social media, and implementation of the best-practice guidelines in news organisations.

Developing and implementing best practice guidelines for media reporting on mental illness in the context of violence and crime has significant potential to reduce stigmatising attitudes and discrimination towards people with mental illness on a large-scale community level, with previous development and implementation of suicide media reporting guidelines shown to be effective in reducing harmful effects. Ultimately, improving media reporting will reduce the adverse impacts of stigma on the lives of people with severe mental illness, thus playing a significant role in improving quality of life and recovery.

Data, visualisation, and new roles: A case study on data journalism in four media outlets in Indonesia

Adek Roza, University of Technology Sydney

Keywords: infographic, data journalism, field theory, Indonesia

Adapting to technological change, key media organisations in Indonesia are deploying data journalism. This genre — characterised by the use of big data and collaborations between journalists and data experts — is expected to restore public trust in the media, amidst the spread of hoaxes and disinformation that have divided the nation after two presidential elections in 2014 and 2019. While data journalism is evident in many forms of journalistic artefacts, the infographic is the most common type adopted by media outlets. This study investigated the adoption of data journalism in Indonesia by content analysing 40 infographics, which were gathered from two-constructed weeks during the second half of 2019, from four news media outlets in the country. These outlets are Kompas.com, Tempo.co, Katadata.co.id, and Tirto.id. They represent online newsrooms owned by legacy media organisations and new online-only news media outlets. The evolving definitions of data journalism are explored. Interviews with journalists from the four outlets were conducted to explore technology uptake and role perceptions. The interview data were explored using thematic analysis. Key findings include: 1. Significant use of visualisation tools by two media outlets, Tempo.co.id and Katadata.co.id, on average 4.6 and 4.1 per infographic; 2. Extensive use of sources by Katadata.co.id (3.5 sources per infographic); and, 3. The emergence of new roles and expertise in newsrooms, such as data analyst and illustrator, which are acknowledged in data journalism artefacts. Applying institutional lens (Anderson 2013) drawn from Bourdieu's theory of fields, reveals organisational and cultural changes to journalism practice in the selected news outlets.

How to increase female voices in the news: What journalists and journalism educators can learn from female expert sources

Kathryn Shine, Curtin University

Keywords: news sources, women in the news, expert sources, journalist-source relationship, gender equality

Research from around the world has consistently found that women are under-represented as sources in the news. Men make up the majority of people quoted, particularly in certain key areas such as politics, business and sport. The Global Media Monitoring Project reported in 2015 that women made up only 24% of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio news. In Australia, men were news sources in 73 per cent of the GMMP coverage analysed, while women made up 27 per cent. The proportion of women included as expert commentators was just 14 per cent.

Much of the research about gender and news sources has been quantitative analyses of news content. The study that informs this presentation aims to build on this quantitative research by describing female expert commentators' attitudes about being interviewed as news sources, and their experiences of interacting with journalists. It reports the findings of semi-structured interviews with 30 female academic experts, representing a broad range of disciplines, from Western Australia. Almost all of the female experts were willing to be interviewed about their research, and the consensus was that their experiences with the news media had been generally positive. However, they referred to various factors that may act as deterrents. These included a lack of confidence, a reluctance to appear on camera, time constraints and a lack of understanding about how the news media operates. This research provides valuable insights for reporters and journalism educators, and outlines recommendations about how to encourage female participation in the news.

Comment is not free: Below the line comment management in Australian online news sites

Catherine Son and Collette Snowden, University of South Australia

Keywords: Digital media, news, journalism, audience, free speech, audiences

 Many digital news media sites allow and encourage readers to comment on news stories. In the early period of digital media diffusion this function was considered to be a development that enabled direct and immediate interaction between news organisations, journalists and their audiences. However, over time the management of the 'below the line' comments on news sites has changed significantly and adapted to new technological affordances and increased audience participation. Initial reader comment access that was free and unfiltered has gradually become more complex and more constrained.

This discussion assesses the processes and practices of below the line content management in four Australian digital news sites and compares current practices to those identified in a study in 2015, and with current practices on other online news sites. The findings from this assessment are discussed in relation to theories that examine news media and media audience interaction, concepts of free speech, and the agenda setting role of news media.

The pedagogy of discovery: The multifaceted success of a student newsroom's regional reporting project

Monica Attard, Helen Vatsikopoulos and Sue Stephenson, University of Technology Sydney

Keywords: drought, bushfires, climate, regional, solutions journalism, philanthropy

In the searing heat of Australia's Black Summer, when the coronavirus was still an offshore contagion, 20 volunteer journalism students from the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) fanned out across NSW to discover how regional communities were mitigating the effects of prolonged drought. Most had reported from city-based climate change protests for the university's student publication Central News yet had little to no experience of life in the bush.

Using the principles of Guided Discovery Learning (Abrahamson & Kapur, 2017), UTS Journalism facilitated learner-centred activities in which students chose their destination; organised transport, accommodation and local fixers; and sourced original stories. They arranged meetings with local editors and radio hosts and asked how they could help bridge the divide between city and country climate reporting. In a philanthropically funded exercise, the Regional Reporting Project explored what students would produce from self-generated rather than received material. This self-directed learning of contemporary reporting practice deployed the principles of Solutions Journalism (McIntyre 2019), in that students investigated and explained the impact of climate change on human habitats, based on character-driven accounts of alleviation strategies. Their stories appeared in a dozen publications in addition to Central News and formed the basis of class-based learning in the UTS Journalism subject Digging Deeper. Additionally, the 'whole story' approach that is the basis of Solutions Journalism, led to a featured exhibition in the international Head On Photo Festival.

This paper aims to explore the pedagogical benefits of field-based and student-led discovery, framed through a Solutions Journalism paradigm.

Humanitarian journalism: Voices of Bosnia-Herzegovina's concentration camp male Muslim survivors

Tiania Stevens, University of Sydney

Keywords: slow journalism, trauma, representation

This presentation confronts the difficult issue of the damage at times inflicted on the people journalism represents. Here, I draw upon case studies of interviews conducted with male Muslim survivors of Serb-run concentration camps during the Bosnian War of the 1990s, in order to suggest how the methods of humanitarian journalism, including 'slow journalism', might be used to represent such survivors in a manner that avoids, or minimizes their retraumatisation.

Survivors of mass-violence who feel the need to bear witness to their experiences face a painful tension: their need to bear witness is strong, but their witnessing often causes them significant pain. Many of these individuals suffer from a range of physical and psychological

problems whose origin is traceable to their incarceration. Many of the participants describe suffering a loss of identity, feelings of helplessness, prolonged depression, emotional numbness and a lack of energy and drive. As Bettelheim (1991) makes plain, mass violence has a profoundly transforming effect on those who experience it. As such, journalism faces a considerable ethical challenge when it comes to the representation of such people. As a vehicle for such witnessing, proponents of humanitarian storytelling advocate giving survivors of mass violence a voice, to present testimony. A slow telling of their narrative.

Each man has his own unique array of sufferings. It is important to note the relation between ill-health and witnessing. Many participants insisted on giving testimony despite knowing that the outcome of telling their stories could lead to further agitation and disquiet. As such I will turn to the toolkit of humanitarian journalism to suggest ways forward to avoid retraumatising survivors of mass-violence with slow journalism at the forefront of the methods I propose to use when interviewing traumatised survivors of mass-violence.

Goodbye Galtung and Ruge - Explaining international news flows

Rodney Tiffen, University of Sydney

Keywords: news values, journalism practice, news organisations, international news coverage

The 1960s article by Galtung and Ruge is one of the most frequently cited articles in media scholarship, and has been invoked or adapted by many scholars wanting to explain international news coverage. This paper begins by arguing that this classic 'theory', based upon an extended signals metaphor, is not in any valid sense explanatory at all. Secondly, some of its key assertions are simply added arbitrarily without any reference to the original hypotheses. Thirdly, the amalgam of propositions, given without any sense of weighting or priority or interaction, makes the theory undesirably indiscriminate and resistant to direct refutation. Fourthly, it explains news content fully in terms of demand and not at all in terms of supply, failing to take seriously news as an institution, with the constraints which that imposes. Moreover as formulated, it cannot explain differences between news organisations in the priority they give to news priorities. Nor can it explain why the amount of international news changes.

There have probably been more content analyses of international news than any other aspect of news. The paper concludes by drawing out some more meaningful theories suggested by these studies, and also from a large content analysis by me of Australian newspapers' international news coverage between 1956 and 2006.

Media without history? The absence of media history in Australian higher education programs

Dr Margaret Van Heekeren, University of Sydney

The fracturing of the media industry and the resulting increase in employment loss and precarity has not had a significant impact on tertiary media and communications programs, which still attract large numbers of undergraduate and postgraduate students. The majority of these current students are of the millennial generation and have no lived experience of the pre-digital media environment. In extending Nerone (2013) and Tucher(2011)'s argument for the need for students of journalism to study journalism history, this paper argues for increased teaching of media history in Australian degree programs. Through a comparative analysis of Australian and international media degrees it finds that offerings of media history studies in Australia are almost non-existent compared to other countries. It argues that distinguishing features of the Australian media environment, not least the concentration of media ownership, demand historical contextualisation. The problem of already crowded curriculum is recognised but given this is a problem experienced globally, the anomaly between Australian and international journalism and media and communications programs with journalism majors remains. Ultimately, an epistemological question is posed: why is media history relatively absent in the building of knowledge of media in tertiary media and communications education in Australia?

The development of Australian journalism culture: A theoretical and methodological framework for investigation

Josie Vine, RMIT University

Viewing journalism as a set of cultural practices has developed into a well-established paradigm through which to analyse the profession over the past three decades. This paper, drawing on the author's major project 'Larrikins, Rebels and Journalistic Freedom in Australia', outlines the theories and methodologies used to investigate the development of Australian journalism's commitment to professional independence. These theories and methodologies, however, revealed the evolution of several other themes related to Australian journalism culture, such as 'playing devil's advocate' and 'championship of the underdog'. This paper, using the theories and methodologies employed in 'Larrikins, Rebels

and Journalistic Freedom in Australia', and drawing on interviews with leading Australian journalists, traces these themes through various chronological socio-political contexts, and how they have facilitated accusations - such as 'Larrikin', 'Communist', 'Left-wing-loonies' and, most recently, purveyors of 'fake news' – used to dismiss journalism over generations.

Communicating about suicide during a global pandemic: Impact on journalists and media audiences

Alexandra Wake, RMIT University

Elizabeth Paton, Everymind, University of Newcastle

Rebecca Pryor, Everymind

Keywords: suicide prevention, mental health and wellbeing, journalism, COVID-19, media guidelines

COVID-19 has brought with it an increase in predictions of mental ill-health and suicide impacts in Australia. For journalists, it has been a period not only of personal stress about their economic livelihoods and occupational safety, but also balancing providing up to date information about the pandemic with safe, sensitive and accurate reporting on associated suicide and mental health issues. Mindframe offers guidelines, resources and individualised support to help manage the complexities of reporting on suicide in this global pandemic, working with media to protect people in their audience who are vulnerable to suicide while also helping journalists protect their own mental health and wellbeing.

Water wars: A 'Critical Listening In' to rural radio discourse on a river system in trouble

Lisa Waller, RMIT University

Emma Mesikammen, La Trobe University

Brian Burkett, Independent Researcher

Keywords: ABC Country Hour, rural radio, Murray-Darling Basin, journalism and critical discourse analysis, Menindee fish kills, #watergate

For news media on the earth's driest continent, changes in the health and politics of Australia's largest river system, the Murray-Darling, have been a major national focus for decades. In recent times, climate crisis, drought and policy failure have combined to

threaten its future, putting the issue under intense public scrutiny. This article offers a critical discourse analysis of specialist rural radio coverage of the issue in 2018-19. It identifies the discourses that the *Country Hour* programme presents and considers the voices and viewpoints that are absent. Two critical discourse moments are analysed: an ecological disaster in which more than one million fish died, and #watergate – a pre-election scandal over commercial water rights. We map the strategies and roles of *Country Hour* journalists and other social actors in legitimating the 'productive use' of the river system above all else, politicizing the issue and shifting responsibility for the river's wellbeing.