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# **A Meaty Discourse:**

## Raising the agenda of an inconvenient message

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Thesis submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy

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# **CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP**

I, Judy Friedlander, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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I had heard the rumours of Pain, Hardship and Despair. My journey through the post-graduate academic landscape can attest to some challenges and intense times but, I am pleased to say, the PhD experience can be better described as Perseverance, Hope and Diligence.

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## Statement of contribution of authors

In the case of Friedlander, J., Riedy, C. & Bonfiglioli, C. 2014, 'A meaty discourse: what makes meat news?' *Food Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. 3. 27-43, the undersigned agree that the nature and extent of the contributions to the work was as follows:

## Declaration by co-authors

Co-author	Nature of contribution	Extent of contribution (%)	Signature	Date
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# Preface

The last decade has seen the contemporary media landscape, like the environmental landscape, subjected to numerous disruptions. Attempts to devise and implement communications strategies to deal with environmental problems need to take the changes in media platforms and uses into account.

This action research thesis has responded to the changes in the media landscape through iterative research cycles that explore and act on evolving communications theories and practices. Accordingly, the thesis structure reflects the unfolding process of action research through evolving questions, methods and findings.

Having been engaged in the research for this project since 2011, the substantial changes in the media landscape over the decade have meant that some of the insights generated in the early action research cycles were considered to be fresher and more current than in the present time. However, the foundational insights have their place in my progression of thinking and are important stepping stones in this research.

Judy Friedlander

July, 2019

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# Abstract

Journalists and activists who aim to raise awareness of and engagement with environmental issues and impacts currently face many challenges. Communicators and campaigners require clever strategies to deal with these challenges, which include exponential increases in information or the ‘infoglut’, powerful adversaries with vested interests, difficult and confronting messages, and a rapidly changing media landscape. This action research, implemented through media content analysis and mixed method evaluation of meat reduction campaigns, proposes communications strategies to raise the media and public agenda of ‘inconvenient’ environmental messages.

While boundaries between news and social media are increasingly blurred, this study argues that journalists and advocates wishing to promote environmental messages should tailor their communication strategies to the media platforms they are working within. In relation to news media, it is suggested that the communicator does not promote messages that directly challenge powerful interests and, therefore, not focus on the ‘conflict’ news value that news media favours. Rather, it may be more productive to develop potential stories that feature alternative news frames and news values that fit in with the interests of legacy news.

Social media strategies for engaging media publics with messages about environmental issues need to consider the new and evolving frameworks and features operating in the contemporary communications landscape. This research proposes that a hybrid pattern of connective action and agenda melding processes offer potential through targeting different communities with particular interests and advocates who are authoritative and are able to network and disseminate content effectively. Other proposed strategies include featuring a range of distinct



frames that incorporates an environmental message, promoting all frames within a 'meta' or umbrella frame, elevating visual representations, and practical contributions of content and technical support.

This research provides new insights into the potential of the celebrity advocate in environmental campaigning. Critics argue that celebrities may not promote the necessary values that translate to genuine and longer-term engagement with advocacy causes. However, this research reveals how the celebrity can be associated with both 'meta-frames' and 'meta-values' and can assist with more effective media engagement. The celebrity can offer benefits through their important role in a connective action network, their metaphoric and symbolic representation of more complex ideas, and their ability to encapsulate a range of distinct messages through association. In relation to 'meta-values', the celebrity can also help to bring new audiences into a campaign through their ability to straddle intrinsic (bigger-than-self) and extrinsic (self-interest) values. The research shows that a celebrity can be an important part of an overall group of advocates who are generally perceived as espousing intrinsic values.

A major contribution of this action research project is a new media theory, which embraces key principles for environmental advocacy. The principles are incorporated into a summary of rubrics encapsulated in the acronym MAVEN. Some key concepts of MAVEN are 'M' for 'meta': metaphors, meta-frames and meta-values which can 'cut through' the 'infoglut'; 'A' for 'agenda melding' which refers to the ability of individuals to set and meld their own agendas in social media networks; 'V' for 'values' that refers to combinations of intrinsic and extrinsic values associated with celebrities and influencers that can have public appeals; 'E' for 'ethos' as signified by the celebrity; and 'N' for 'news', a reminder that news stories are still associated with a public agenda.

