

Thinking outside the box:
Public service broadcasting, participatory media and local
community networks in regional Australia

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the motivations for and outcomes of participatory media practice in the context of national public service broadcasting in a time of digital transformation. It explores this question through the case of ABC Open, a participatory media initiative of the Australian national public service broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). ABC Open provides an online platform for publishing and distributing media content through the broadcast and publishing networks of the ABC. A distinctive element of ABC Open is that it provides ‘on-the-ground’ training for regional Australians to assist these citizens to engage in participatory media practices. This thesis investigates the motivations of a group of participants, using qualitative research methods, and the impact of their participation on themselves, in particular, on the creation and strengthening of local networks. The research question for this thesis is: *What are the motivations and outcomes of participatory media production in the context of the national public service broadcaster in a time of digital transformation?* It situates this question in the context of a rapidly changing technological environment and heightened scrutiny of the role of the public service media, in an age of the convergence of media and the fragmentation of audiences. It concludes with a discussion of the potential role of participatory media to show a more pluralistic representation of national identity through the ABC as a national public service broadcaster.

GLOSSARY

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
API	Application Programming Interface – a software-to-software interface. APIs provide the building blocks which allow computer programmers to build software to e.g. draw content from one website to another website.
NBN	National Broadband Network
PSB	Public Service Broadcasting
PSM	Public Service Media
Third party platform	A publishing platform outside of the ABC e.g. Flickr or Vimeo
UGC	User generated content

CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

In 2009, the managing director of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Mark Scott, announced a boost to the Corporation's budget and a new role for the ABC, as a host of audience created content:

New funding for broadband content affirms the ABC's role as Australia's town square – a place Australians can come to speak and be heard, to listen and learn from each other. Broadband funding puts the ABC at the centre of the new digital revolution; using fast networks to communicate new content with audiences in different ways and allowing the ABC to host content the audiences create themselves. (Culkoff, 2009a)

In doing so, Scott acknowledged the place of the national broadcaster in a new media ecosystem, one that had been signposted several years before when *Time* magazine announced the person of the year as "You". As Jose van Dijck writes, "After decades of vilifying the passive couch potato, the press now venerates the active participant in digital culture" (van Dijck, 2009, p. 41).

The ability to self-publish online has created new audiences for content, considerably fragmenting audiences for traditional media, and creating new forms of co-creative labour relations. The motivations of the active participant in digital culture and the outcomes of participatory practice in the context of traditional, public service media is the subject of this research project.

We live in an age of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006; Shirky, 2010). Web 2.0 has allowed new services and activities that "permit or create a new kind of media consumer who is more engaged, active and a participant in the key business of the Internet: creating, maintaining and expanding the 'content' which is the basis for using the Internet in the first place" (Allen, 2008). Web 2.0 means that rather than simply delivering content, organizations are now engaged in the provision of services to active audiences, through technologies which prioritise interaction providing access and even "empowerment" to individuals (Allen, 2008).

Since the early years of the internet, the potential to connect with others has raised the potential for new configurations of community, including non-geographically based communities of interest and practice (Rheingold, 1994; Turkle, 1995; Leadbeater & Miller, 2004; Shirky, 2008). Web 2.0 interactivity has significantly increased this potential to connect with others, through a variety of formats and allowing for the dissemination of a greater range of information and views across geographic boundaries.

But as the Internet increasingly permeates our daily lives, there also seems to be a re-emergence of the importance of the local. As connectivity increases globally, one of the less well-noted consequences is the potential for increased and richer *local* communicative networks. Participatory media allows for the representation of a much wider range of perspectives, including local perspectives, than was previously made possible through traditional media. One result of this is the potential to reinvigorate local networks and communities through online participation. While research has often focused around participation online, or alternatively, connection offline, a growing body of research (Haythornthwaite & Kendall, 2010) points to the connection between offline and online participation in networks and activities, many of which exist within local boundaries.

This research project investigates the tensions between communities of interest and geographical communities in relation to user-generated media content created by regional Australians, in the context of national public service broadcasting. Its focus is ABC Open, a participatory media project of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation aimed at training regional Australians to engage with each other through digital media. There are 45 ABC Open producers across Australia who facilitate the creation of digital media content to be published through ABC Open. In July 2014, over 8,000 Australians have contributed content in the form of images, videos (both moving image and stills with audio) and text (ABC Open, 2014a).

ABC Open has been described in terms of a broader ABC agenda to be Australia's "digital 'town square' where anyone can engage in *the* (my emphasis) Australian conversation, and where the notion of community is not restricted to where you live" (ABC, 2009, p. 15). A key purpose of the ABC as a public service broadcaster is to contribute to a sense of national identity (Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act, 1983). While this research

project began with the assumption that the main motivation for participation in online content creation through the ABC was to engage with those at a distance, whether at a national and even a global level, the importance of locality has emerged as a significant factor, more so than initially expected. The village, it seems, is at least or perhaps even more important than the national and the global. In this context, this research project attempts to explore the extent to which localism matters to ABC Open contributors – people who choose to engage with the ABC as the institutional public service publisher of regionally created digital content.

1.2 Background

ABC Open was created through an injection of specific tied funding to the ABC by the Australian Federal Rudd Labor government in the 2009-10 Federal Budget (Australian Government, 2009). Additional funding to the ABC was earmarked for the ‘Rural and Regional National Broadband Network Initiative — ABC regional broadband hubs’, and was seen as a boost to complement the rollout of the National Broadband Network, a key nation building initiative of the government at the time. Funding was specifically earmarked for the employment of local producers to create content and to provide training to assist communities in the creation of user-generated content (UGC).

In October 2009 I was employed as co-director of this project (a job share position with my then colleague, Ann Chesterman), which in early 2010 was named ABC Open. In this role, I was charged with directing the roll out and implementation of the initiative, including the development of its content strategy and the recruitment of 50 regional producers and editors to actively assist participants to create digital media content, through face-to-face training and online interactions. My professional role has therefore been highly influential in terms of the development of ABC Open, and has raised specific challenges for this research project, which I discuss further in Chapter 3.

ABC Open represents a change in the role of traditional broadcast media, in a period of rapid transformation in both traditional media and in the scope and use of the internet. The globalization of markets, coupled with the availability of inexpensive production tools and the development of easily accessible distribution networks has fragmented audiences and raised significant challenges for traditional media, including the ABC. In a networked

multiplatform environment, competition occurs not just within but between media, as newspapers, broadcasters and websites fight for space in the same market. The traditional one-to-many broadcaster is faced with competition from many sources, as citizens are now able to find information, news and entertainment through a wide variety of channels. These include social media networks like Twitter, Facebook, Reddit or BuzzFeed, where media companies have little control over the context in which their content is seen and heard.

Over the last decade, the effects of these changes have been acutely felt by commercial and non-commercial media alike. Public service media organizations have been particularly challenged to reconceptualise their remit in the light of increased consumer choice, competition and deregulation (Tambini & Cowling, 2004), and to reconsider their audiences as participants (Aslama, 2010) and users (Bracken & Balfour, 2004) driving interaction with each other as well as with institution itself (Martin, 2012).

The ABC has responded to the challenge of fragmenting audiences by extending its multiplatform services in order to increase the reach of ABC content so that it can be readily accessed at any time on a range of platforms, including social media sites. ABC's on-demand television service, iView, lets viewers watch programs outside of the television schedule, and a range of new apps and mobile sites allows ABC content to be accessed through mobile phones and tablets. Websites now include social media share buttons to allow content to be easily distributed through online social networks. The ABC has also created a number of different avenues for audiences to participate by making and sharing their own digital content both online (Martin, 2012; Hutchinson & Bruns, 2013) and through the incorporation social media into its broadcast output (Given & Radwyl, 2013). The development of ABC Open takes the ABC further along this path set by the introduction of interactive web technology into the national broadcaster's business objectives (Martin, 2007; Hawkins, 2010).

Yet the extension of the ABC's online services has not been without its critics. Following the launch of ABC Open in 2010, Fairfax Media chief executive, Brian McCarthy, accused the national broadcaster of threatening to undermine the services of commercial media in regional areas, thus diminishing the diversity of opinion and choice for regional communities ('ABC venture may force newspaper closures: Fairfax', 2010). The launch of

the 24 hour digital news service News 24 later that year was criticised by Angelos Frangopoulos, the chief executive of the Australian News Channel (which produces Sky News) as a misuse of taxpayer funds (Shoebridge, 2010), a cry that has been reiterated by a number of other commercial media executives, including News Corp chief executive Julian Clarke, who, while addressing the Canberra Press Club in 2013, asked, 'Why is a business like the ABC, which is a government-owned and run business, why is it operating in a commercial space?' (Leys, 2010). Thus ABC, including ABC Open specifically, operates in a context of increasing market pressure for media operators in the online space, which has manifested in a debate over the role of the public broadcaster.

While audience participation is now seen as a strategic imperative for many media organizations in the digital era (Enli, 2008; Newman, 2009), pre-digital forms of audience participation should also be noted. Talkback radio is a long established form allowing audiences to interact with radio program hosts and guests. The ABC has for many decades provided talkback as part of its radio programs, as "a virtual backyard fence for the sharing of gossip, opinion, and local concerns" (Turner, 2009, p. 416) enjoying a high degree of support for these broadcasts as "a politically empowering, democratizing, and community building mechanism" (Turner, 2009, p. 417). The ABC has from time to time in its history sought comment and feedback about its output from its audience most notably through the television program *Backchat*, a twice-weekly 10-minute program in which journalist Tim Bowden presented letters from the audience about the ABC's radio and television programs (Bell, n.d.).

The digital era has brought new and different kinds of opportunities for audience interaction both online and through radio and TV broadcasts. The development of these services at the ABC began in the mid 1990s, when ABC Online sites sought to include audience comments and ideas through both time bounded live forums and ongoing asynchronous discussions via ongoing guest books (Martin, 2007; 2012). Examples include the current affairs show Four Corners, which introduced highly moderated "as-live" user commentary following its weekly program, and the science discussion hub Self Service Science, which encouraged users to interact with each other and invited their input into the ongoing development of the site itself (Martin, 2012, pp. 185-6).

This interactivity was extended with the development of new web-based applications which allowed audiences to upload multimedia content they had created, including video, images and music, to ABC websites. While a full survey of the extent of these interactive services is too large for this research project, successful examples include the music sharing platform triplejuneearthed.com, the website Pool, and the television show Q & A.

triplejuneearthed.com was launched by the ABC's youth network, triple j, in 2006. The site is a music-sharing platform, allowing unsigned musicians and bands to create their own artist pages and upload a profile and three of their songs. The platform is used by triple j to source new talent, while audiences can review songs, leave comments and contact bands through a direct messaging system. This platform is used to provide music for a digital radio station which commenced operation in 2011.

In April 2008, ABC Radio National opened the site, Pool, which was also a publishing platform allowing audiences to upload content. Audience members could create profiles, upload creative media content (including text, video and audio), and build collaborative projects. Pool was a site of experimentation, encouraging the use of Creative Commons licenses so that participants could share and remix content, and publishing selected ABC archival material for community use. The site was also used as a way of sourcing broadcast content for Radio National (Hutchinson & Bruns, 2013). Pool ceased operations in 2013.

A month after Pool was launched, ABC TV began broadcasting the television panel show, Q & A, which not only invited a live studio audience to ask questions of its panel members, but also encouraged viewers to upload questions in text or video form. By 2010, the program was also broadcasting a selection of comments gathered live via Twitter (Given & Radwyl, 2013).

By the late 2000s, the ABC had developed a range of other avenues for the publication of user-generated content. The creation of ABC Open extended this approach.

Operationalised through a new workforce of creator/producer/enablers, ABC Open not only publishes content made by audiences but provides a focus for content creation: through projects and events and through face-to-face skills training for regional Australians to help them create content. Some of this content is then distributed via various broadcast and publishing channels of the ABC, further breaking down the traditional relationship

between broadcaster and audience.

The ABC Open model

The ABC Open model is unique in terms of both its scope and reach. While many media organisations now encourage community participation (Newman, 2009), examples of traditional media organizations training community members to create content are scarce outside the community media sector. A notable exception is the BBC, which between 1993 and 2013 provided some face-to-face training for audiences in video and digital storytelling (Carpentier, 2003; Meadows & Kidd, 2009).

The role of the ABC Open producer is therefore unusual in the Australian media landscape. The primary task of this producer is to be a single local contact point for citizens who want to make content to publish through the ABC. Producers instigate participation and act as catalysts for the involvement of community members in content creation. They run group workshops and also work one-on-one with contributors, providing digital media literacy training in a range of formats (video, text, photography and to a lesser extent audio) for the purpose of distribution via online publishing, broadcast and social media. These interactions can occur face-to-face or remotely using the telephone, email and Skype.

Producers are based in ABC regional radio stations, which are situated across a very large and highly diverse group of geographic locations. They may be located in large regional cities (e.g. Wollongong, NSW), smaller centres (e.g. Shepparton, Victoria) or remote locations (e.g. Kununurra in the remote West Kimberley region of Western Australia).

This producer role is highly flexible and reactive to the needs of each individual and the circumstances in which the production process occurs. As Alex Smee told ABC Open contributor, Sudha Coutinho, about her job in the Kimberley region of Western Australia:

It changes every day, depending on who you're working with...It's very remote, people don't have the technology that's required most of the time to make this sort of stuff, so I guess it's very challenging that way...I also have to work out what technology they have to use, and how I can get them to a finished product using what they've got. (Coutinho, 2012)

The ABC Open producer is not an activist, and ABC Open does not identify social change as a primary goal. While there may be outcomes that enhance the common good, the main aim of the ABC Open producer is to stimulate community participation. The ABC, through ABC Open, seeks to be a facilitator of conversations. It does not strive for specific social outcomes for its participants or the communities in which it operates, but it does aim to create opportunities for community members to connect and collaborate, to “speak and be heard, listen and understand” (Scott, 2009).

Deuze, Bruns & Neuberger (2007) argue that models for participation in mainstream media are still “under construction”. So, too, is the role of the professional who facilitates this participation. ABC Open producers are part traditional producer, part teacher, marketer, publicist, collaborator and mentor. The degree of direction and collaboration is highly dependent on the skills, ability and interest of contributors.

ABC Open, at the time of writing, lists over 8100 people on its website (ABC Open, 2014a), with over 57,800 individual contributions, although it should be noted that ABC Open producer-made content also registers as a contribution on the site (ABC Open, 2014b). The number of citizens who have produced content for ABC Open now exceeds the total number of current ABC staff. In November 2013, ABC Open has over 8170 people (i.e. contributors) listed on its website (ABC Open, 2013b). Taking into account the ABC Open producers listed in this group, there remain at over 8000 community contributors, a number which exceeds the total number of ABC staff in 2013 (ABC, 2013).

In 2012-13, ABC Open producers delivered 2515 multimedia training workshops and mentoring sessions to 12,100 people aged between 15 and 80 years of age (ABC, 2013). Unpublished internal workshop attendance figures show that participants are primarily female (65%) and over the age of 35 (64%) with the largest number of participants (25%) in the 45 to 59 year old age range (figures provided by ABC Open). However, it should be noted that this data has not been collected in an empirically rigorous way. Figures are gathered through weekly surveys of producers, for the purpose of providing a broad sense of workshop activities. Producers do not always submit workshop data, and often do not include one-on-one training and mentoring activities. Furthermore producers do not collect age information from participants, but estimate the age range of workshop attendees. These figures are therefore open to interpretation and should not be relied

upon.

However it is clear that the contributor base for ABC Open is large and geographically diverse. Over 4900 locations are listed as places on the ABC Open website (ABC Open, 2014c), including large regional cities, small towns and isolated properties.

While a small number of professional and semi-professional media producers (primarily photographers) contribute, the vast majority of contributors are non-professional and includes people with non-media related occupations, those out of the workforce, and those who are not of working age.

In a sense, ABC Open upends many of the traditional practices of media commissioning and broadcasting. Instead of commissioning specific stories, ABC Open calls for contributions based around broad themes and then seeks distribution channels for those stories through other ABC broadcast and publication channels. ABC Open, then, operates in relatively uncharted territory, attempting to engage individuals in loose networks with the aim of harnessing their efforts in a mediated, curated broadcast/publication space.

Content is sourced around particular themes, techniques or genres, and published through the ABC Open website. The website was not initially a publishing platform, but an aggregator of content which was collected through the third party platforms, Flickr and Vimeo. ABC Open contributors were required to sign up to these sites and then tag their content, allowing it to be 'fetched' via an application programming interface (API). In 2012, the site became a platform, allowing contributors to register and upload some types of media content directly to the site (including text and images, although at the time of writing there is no direct upload of videos).

While ABC Open represents a significant opening up of traditional media channels, allowing for direct upload to its site, it is not an open platform, but a moderated institutionally based online space. It is important to note that it does not allow peer-to-peer sharing, and all content is moderated prior to publication, based on project guidelines published on the site or, in the case of guest posts, in accordance with internal guidelines and subject to the ABC's editorial policies.

The institutional challenges of incorporating UGC into the ABC's operations are multi-faceted. The ABC, for example, has created editorial policies to deal with user-generated content, covering areas such as impartiality and balance (ABC, 2012a). The publishing of content relating to children has also proved to be a highly complex area for the ABC, as it seeks to protect its reputation in the context of cultural shifts where images of children are now widely distributed on social media platforms (ABC, 2012b).

Copyright and ownership are also contentious subjects for media organizations in the age of online content sharing. At one end of the spectrum, Facebook - the social networking platform used widely by both consumers and media organisations - offers connection and distribution in exchange for a "non-exclusive, transferable, sub-licensable, royalty-free, worldwide license to use any IP content that you post on or in connection with Facebook" (Facebook, 2012) while at the other end, Creative Commons licensing invites creators to choose from a range of licensing options, which include a license to alter and republish content free of license fees (Creative Commons, n.d.). ABC Open sits somewhere in the middle. ABC Open contributors retain the rights to their content, yet by uploading content to the ABC Open site they agree to provide the ABC with a non-exclusive, worldwide license to use the work for non-commercial purposes, including the right to provide that content on any platform, to exhibit the content in public at an ABC event and to provide it in any downloadable format for free from any ABC online service (ABC Open, n.d., a).

While all the uploaded content is housed on the ABC Open site, a selection is also then published and broadcast through other ABC sites, broadcast channels and social media pages: on television, through both the 24 hour news channel, News 24, and to a much lesser extent ABC 1; on radio, through the network of ABC Local regional radio stations, and, to a small extent, Radio National; and online, through ABC websites (e.g. various Radio National program sites, ABC Arts, ABC Indigenous) and through a large number of social media accounts (including the primary ABC Facebook page, and ABC News Facebook, and a range of ABC Open and ABC local radio accounts).

Content that is published or broadcast on other ABC platforms (TV, radio or other websites or social media pages) is selected by producers or the ABC Open editorial team of executive and supervising producers based on the perceived suitability of the story for each of the specific platforms (Chesterman, interview, November 13, 2013).

The wide distribution of content across various platforms provides significant challenges in the measuring of audience reach and impact. Overall web metrics for ABC Open are not publicly available although metrics for individual stories (in the form of views) are referenced on a small selection of featured stories across the site. However some individual stories have a significantly higher reach when they are broadcast on television or repurposed for radio or distributed through highly visible ABC web pages e.g. the ABC homepage (abc.net.au) or ABC News online (abc.net.au/news).

Yet while the strategic importance of audience participation has been recognised by many media organisations (Enli, 2008; Newman, 2009), the full promise of participatory media is far from being realized. Online consumption is on the rise, yet online participation is still relatively rare (Nielsen, 2006) and much of the participation that occurs is institutionally controlled and filtered (Couldry, 2012). The reasons for this may be many and varied, yet are often described in terms of a digital divide, where access to technology and skills is limited to those who are already privileged (Livingstone, Van Couvering & Thumim, 2008). While the idea and extent of a digital divide is the subject of ongoing debate, Jenkins' concept of a "participation gap" (Jenkins, 2006, p.23) provides a useful way of understanding the boundaries of inclusion in participatory culture. Although the term digital divide was originally used to describe a lack of access to hardware and software, Jenkins contends that questions of equity cannot be solved purely by technology, and argues that inclusion in participatory culture is dependent on a familiarity with new kinds of social interactions (Jenkins, 2006) and a set of social skills and cultural competencies which include the ability to collaborate and network (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009).

The ABC Open model implicitly acknowledges this participation gap, by engaging in practices to encourage citizens to collaborate with the ABC and each other, and to access the technological and human networks of the ABC itself. It has some features of a model described by Spurgeon et al (2009) as 'co-creative production', a subset of participatory culture that involves "intentional participatory media engagements that rely upon professional facilitators to lead collaborative projects with explicit purposes and aims" (Spurgeon et al. 2009, p. 276). Co-creative production is a facilitated approach which does not rely solely on the idea that "if build it, they will come", but recognizes that technology

itself is not enough. This concept of co-creative production differs from the spontaneous participation described by Jenkins (2006), and often has a more specific goal of engaging with communities for a socially constructive purpose.

ABC Open falls somewhere between these two models, offering opportunities for both facilitated and spontaneous participation. Community members can simply upload of their own accord, or they can receive direct face-to-face assistance from a producer. Their content may be moderated and published without any interaction, or they might receive detailed feedback and technical assistance.

Yet while producers are instigators of these kinds of connective opportunities, a key concern for ABC Open is finding ways to develop routines of practice with its contributors, and to thereby move them from a mediated to a spontaneous mode of participation. While running workshops is an effective way to engage contributors, the reliance on workshops as the primary mode of engaging participants limits the numbers of people who can be involved. The ability to produce content with little assistance from a producer is contingent on the skill-level and interest of individual community members. According to Chesterman, developing habits of participation in contributors is an ongoing challenge for the project:

I think it's more difficult than we anticipated, moving people to that next level where they can produce things on their own...The aim of repeat contributors, that's been the main goal, and I think there have been a few things that probably have been successful in some places, so, pairing people up together, trying to encourage people to have their own groups that they manage themselves, they get together and produce things together.

By seeking to develop these habits of participation, ABC Open producers instigate not just interaction with the ABC but also local interactions and relationships between citizens.

Local and/or national

ABC Open has as its specific focus "Australian regional communities who want to get involved in sharing their experiences through the ABC via websites, radio and TV". To that end ABC Open "invites regional communities to produce and publish photos, stories, videos, and sound through the ABC" (ABC Open, n.d., b).

Therefore, ABC Open is not funded for and does not operate in Australian capital cities. Its existence is a result of government policy aimed at enhancing the lives of Australians through the proposed rollout of fast broadband services to regional areas. High speed broadband was a key policy platform of the Rudd Labor government, presented to the Australian public as a significant infrastructure project to allow all Australians to participate in the digital economy (Conroy, 2009). The policy assumes that greater connectivity will lead to a higher quality of life for regional Australians, and that a greater range of options for services, including communication services, will increase the attractiveness of regional life and build the capacity for stronger communities.

The ABC has traditionally reported on regional life, however, much of this content is experienced on a local level, through local radio and websites. One exception to this was the online gateway, The Backyard, launched in 1999, which provided an early entry point to locally made online content, from both regional and metropolitan areas (Martin & Wilson, 2002). In 2008, The Backyard was replaced by ABC Local (ABC, n.d. a), which directs audience members to one of 53 web pages, each focused on a different regional broadcast area (ABC, n.d. b)

Hence, in 2014 the vast majority of ABC stories that are produced regionally are not seen or heard outside of programs or web pages which focused on specific localities and regions. Local radio sites are the primary way in which online audiences can search for and access content along geographic lines.

There are some content areas which bring regional stories together nationally, including ABC TV's *Landline*, Rural Online, the *Country Hour*, and Radio National's *Bush Telegraph*. These programs and websites are produced by professional journalists and producers and present a range of regional experiences. The decision about whether a story is suitable for a local audience or a national one is determined by professional producers who decide which stories will be interesting for a national audience, and which are primarily locally relevant.

ABC Open staff members also make these value judgements, distributing content to other ABC websites and broadcasting them on ABC TV if they are deemed to be of national interest. Yet the distinguishing factor of ABC Open is that all content, whether it is

nationally relevant or primarily for a local audience, is not only housed in one place, it is also searchable by specific location and contributor.

ABC Open is conceptualised not just as a regionally based project, to both “build awareness of local issues, and stimulate and facilitate community participation” (Conroy, 2009) but also as a site of nation building, or as Managing Director Mark Scott puts it, to affirm the ABC’s role as “Australia’s town square” (Scott, 2009). The town square metaphor refers to broad objectives, in line with the ABC’s role as a builder of national identity: “We aspire to be Australia’s town square: a space where all voices can be heard – where the nation comes to engage – to listen to each other, to learn from each other – to better understand each other and the world” (Scott, 2008).

The concept of the national broadcaster as a builder of national identity and unity is deeply embedded in the history of the ABC. The ABC was developed in the model of the BBC, and like the BBC it was seen as “a citizen forming institution, central to making Australians visible to themselves, for fostering national culture and interests and for producing informed democratic subjects” (Hawkins, 2010, p. 289).

According to its charter, the ABC aims not only to broadcast “programs that contribute to a sense of national identity” but also to “reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community” (Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983). Yet these two aims have often been in tension with one another (Hawkins, 2010). The adoption of new multimedia technologies and processes by the ABC and other public service broadcasters on the one hand recognises the limitations of traditional broadcasting yet on the other hand brings to the fore the fundamental difficulty faced by a broadcaster like the ABC - its call to represent national unity “in the face of infinite lived diversity” (Martin, 2007, p. 3).

The ABC Open website reveals a broad range of individual experiences which once may not have been recognised as regional. Traditional representations of life outside Australian capital cities have tended to focus on the agricultural sector, with stereotypes of men in Akubra hats or families on the land. The ABC Open website includes a wide range of Australian regional experiences which go far beyond these traditional stereotypes.

ABC Open has certainly achieved regional diversity, allowing for stories to be published by

community members from a multitude of regional and remote locations in Australia and aggregated in a national collection. There are also some instances of specific projects aimed at engaging people with disabilities, Indigenous Australians and refugee communities as creators and subjects.

These include Dreambox (ABC Open, 2011b), which ran from June 2011 to June 2012 and consists of a series of photographs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people holding up a chalkboard on which they have written their dream or aspiration. The engagement of Indigenous Australians in this project was mostly as subjects rather than photographers, who were mostly ABC Open producers. However, in May 2013, the site launched Me and Mine (ABC Open, 2013) which is open only to contributions created by people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and are accepted as members of those communities.

ABC Open also focused on engaging people with disabilities for the Moment Behind the Photo project (ABC Open, 2011c) to showcase their contributions for the International Day of Disability in 2011. In 2012, Ballarat producer, Marc Eiden, worked with the local deaf community to produce a series of videos for the project that included Auslan subtitles (ABC Open, 2012). There are a range of other examples on the website, which indicates that ABC Open is at some level attempting to engage with regional Australians with disabilities.

However, cultural diversity remains a challenge. The ABC has long struggled with representing the mainstream while also delivering on its charter obligation to represent cultural diversity (Hawkins, 2010). While ABC Open does host a range of stories produced with and by members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, it certainly has the potential to increase the representation of regional citizens from these communities.

The participation of audiences creates opportunities for representing a diversity of voices and experiences. While professionalized reporting and content production remains the norm, audience-created content is being accepted, it appears at least partly, *because* it is audience generated and not created by professional content producers.

This increased interaction between citizens and the ABC has the potential to enable a more pluralistic vision of the nation - as William Connolly calls it "rhizomatic pluralism" (Burns, 2002, p. 64). According to Burns analysis of Connolly, the idea of nation-state is no longer

focused around a centre, but is de-centred and constantly in the process of becoming. In this conceptualization of the nation state, difference, rather than unity, is fundamental.

The development of ABC Open appears to mirror this 'process of becoming'. While institutional motives for ABC Open might include the desire to be hosts of "a national conversation" (Scott, 2010) and to create a space where "the nation comes to engage" (Scott, 2008), this research focuses on the importance of localised motivations and outcomes. These ideas need not be in tension – indeed the ABC itself identifies localism as an important aim, and even a strength (Scott, 2008). Thus the role of the ABC, as an animator of both local and national conversations, provides context for this research question.

1.3 Research context

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures indicate a large number of Australians use the internet, both at home and via mobile. Figures for 2014 indicate that the number of households with access to the internet at home continues to increase, reaching 7.3 million households in 2012–13 and representing 83% of all households (up from 79% in 2010–11). More than three quarters (77%) of all households had access to the internet via a broadband connection (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Recent ABS figures also show 19.6 million subscribers with internet access connections via a mobile handset in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

While search and email remain the primary uses of the internet, participation in social platforms is increasingly widespread. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr and other platforms provide a wide range of online social networks that can be used to share information and media content.

Clearly we live in a world of rapid techno-cultural change, and research in this field struggles to keep pace with this ever-evolving environment. A wide body of literature focuses on more established forms of computer-mediated interaction, e.g. multiplayer online games or chat rooms and bulletin boards. Research into Web 2.0 has primarily been focused in three areas: collaborative production (e.g. Wikipedia, open source software communities), social media (Facebook, YouTube), and citizen journalism. While some of this

research forms an important backdrop to my research, there are significant differences between collaborative platforms like Wikipedia, the self-publishing model of YouTube, and ABC Open, which is part of a large, public service broadcaster. Much of this research into web based communities relates to the functioning of user relationships and hierarchies and the implications for content creation and management and is therefore not of primary relevance to my study.

There is an emerging body of research focused on participatory media in an institutional, public service media context which provides a useful context for this project. Threats to public media including channel fragmentation, a shrinking funding base and a political shift away from support for public service broadcasters during the 1980s have led to much discussion of a crisis in public broadcasting, yet in recent times several scholars have sought to re-imagine the public service remit for the digital age (Debrett, 2010). These scholars argue that online possibilities for new relationships between PSMs and audiences (Aslama 2010), increased democratic conversations and new forms of citizenship (Flew 2011; McClean, 2011) are of particular importance for the survival of public service media in the digital age, charged as it is with creating inclusive platforms for engagement with public life (McClean, 2011, p. 1649).

A key focus for this area of study is the interaction between media institutions and audiences, and both the possibilities of and limits to interactivity in an institutional context (Bakker, 2012; Martin 2012; Given & Radwyl, 2013). However, as Bakker (2012) points out, online participation has mainly been researched “via content analysis of websites, interviews with journalists and editors and studies of documents” (Bakker, 2012, p. 240), that is, from an institutional, rather than from individual, audience member perspectives.

Wardle and Williams’ 2008 study of UGC at the BBC did include the perspective of audience members including those who contribute to news sites and those who did not, alongside data collected from interviews with editors and journalists and content analysis of websites. The focus of the BBC’s approach at this time was to encourage the use of eyewitness reports, a much less collaborative form of audience engagement than the ABC Open approach, and so while this research project had some interesting findings about the reception of UGC it did not focus on motivations for participation, nor did it explore collaborative content creation.

More recently Piet Bakker's (2012) review of a range of online participatory models analysed the failures and successes of online audience participation. Primarily focused on news media, his research challenges both the optimism that has characterized much of the research in this field and the idea that audience participation will ever be anything other than marginal to the business of news reporting. He explains the lack of success on several factors, including the low importance media organizations give to UGC, as well as structural and technical issues (Bakker, 2012, pp. 244-5). He does, however, note several factors which aid participation, including a focus on local content, non-news content and a sense from users that their content will be recognized and used (Bakker, 2012, p. 246). He concludes that the high expectations of participatory media have led to much disappointment, but also to some initiatives that actually do live up to these expectations (Bakker, 2012, p. 249-250). While his findings resonate with my own, his research focuses primarily on the effects of participation on media organisations rather than motivations of participants and the effects of participation on these audience members.

In a local context there are several Australian studies covering the challenges and possibilities for online interactivity in a public service media context. Martin (2002) and Martin and Wilson (2002) chart the early years of ABC Online primarily focusing on institutional responses to the challenges of digital convergence and audience interaction (at that time primarily online forums and comments). McClean (2011) and Flew (2011) have examined participatory models at the Special Broadcasting Service, SBS, in terms of multicultural sociability (McClean, 2011) and media citizenship (Flew, 2011). The recent use of social media as both a back-channel and an integrated feature of the ABC live television program Q&A has been explored by Given and Radwyl (2013) and Hawkins (2013). While a fascinating subject for research, the Q&A model, as a live, political debate including the televised broadcast of a small number of tightly managed user comments via Twitter differs significantly from the case of ABC Open, which has as its focus the collection of multimedia, primarily non-news content.

While comments, online discussion, blogs and eyewitness accounts have been well canvassed in the literature, the sharing of other kinds of content (including non-news videos and written personal accounts) through PSM websites is a relatively new development. ABC's Pool is a notable example. Hutchinson's (2013) doctoral thesis on the

online collaborative site ABC Pool explored user-generated content and related audience activities and how the different interests of stakeholders in this online community are negotiated with the role of the public service broadcaster. He focuses on the role of cultural intermediaries in the context of public service media, exploring the effect of participation on the ABC as an institution.

While the effect of audience participation on PSM organizations is highly relevant to my study, this research project is primarily focused on the participants themselves. As such it draws on earlier studies into the effects of the internet on everyday life, including the work of Barry Wellman, the head of the NetLab at the University of Toronto. As early as 1999, he and fellow researcher Keith Hampton, writing about computer-mediated networks, concluded that these networks may both encourage and strengthen local relationships (Wellman & Hampton, 1999). Quan-Haase, Wellman, Witte & Hampton (2002) have argued that the internet is increasing social capital and civic engagement. Matei and Ball-Rokeach (2002) have further supported the relevance of local connections to online interactions. Again, much of this research on localised communities has focused on direct forms of communication such as email and chat.

Participatory media offers new possibilities for communication for individual users, both between themselves and with the larger public, be that local or more widespread. While there is extensive research on communities of interest in relation to participatory practices, there is very little examination of the kind of rich media content creation that ABC Open has facilitated in either an institutional or a local context. ABC Open, therefore, provides a unique model for a further interrogation of place, community and network in the context of the increasing use of shared digital media across a range of mediated and non-mediated, commercial and public platforms.

1.4 Developing the research question

The research question was developed through an iterative process covering a period of time when the priorities of ABC Open were being developed and refined. This process began with the establishment of ABC Open, including the hiring of producers, the development of the ABC Open website and the first phase of ABC Open projects and activities.

Throughout the initial exploratory period producer feedback played an important role. During this phase I observed and participated in two to three phone conference calls per week with producers (talking to up to 28 producers a week), held weekly phone conference calls with editors, and participated in hundreds of one-on-one conversations with producers about their work in regional communities.

The early research process also included a general observation of ABC Open, including the context of the ABC as the national public service broadcaster. In early strategy meetings the boundaries of ABC Open were often discussed in terms of the broader purpose of the ABC. This context is an important underpinning of the research, and brings its own unique history, aims and practices. During the initial phase of this project I observed that critical decisions about the scope and activities of ABC Open were made in the context of fulfilling, and just as importantly not overstepping, the ABC's charter obligations.

Throughout the early stages of ABC Open and this research, the primary focus was on the motivation of contributors in this context. Why would people participate through the ABC when there are other platforms, e.g. YouTube, which are less narrowly focused, are easy to use and already popular? Using participant observation, I wrote extensive notes during this time, noting recurrent themes in the discussion and attempting to frame the question around two key concepts: the role of the public broadcaster as an outlet for contributors, and the drive to participate in national conversations.

Towards the end of the first year of ABC Open, it became evident that there was a widely held view amongst producers that ABC Open should place more emphasis on localism. Producers expressed a strong sense that local connections were highly significant in terms of attracting and rewarding contributors, and that the online presentation of content according to geographical boundaries was highly desired by participants. Offline events, such as screenings and exhibitions, came to be seen as highly valued by ABC Open producers as a way of motivating and rewarding contributions. Many of the producers I spoke with during this time also requested improvements to the navigation so that locally based stories could be more easily found on the ABC Open website.

Through these conversations, producers expressed a view that real world outcomes are as

important, if not more important, than online outcomes. In this view, contributors might be more motivated to join in because of a connection to local community and not necessarily because participation allowed them to enter into a new virtual world, or connect with people far away, or be part of a larger conversation. This contrasted with the widely held assumption within ABC Open that people would want to participate in ABC Open primarily to be part of a community of interest, to join 'the national conversation' which had become widely used as a way for the ABC to describe its activities. This was somewhat surprising. ABC Open responded to these concerns by employing an events coordinator, which, in turn, led to an increase in locally based offline events. I thought this was an interesting development worthy of further investigation.

An investigation of the literature revealed an interconnectedness between online and offline activities in a local context. The local might matter in the same way online as it does offline, that is, while many people engage with networks far and wide they primarily live their lives locally. The importance of locality in this context seemed worthy of further investigation.

This emphasis on offline events raised more questions; to what extent is offline activity significant in driving online participation? To what extent and under what circumstances is user-generated content made possible in this context? And, flowing from this: how networked (offline) are ABC Open participants?

The act of participation involves not only the drive to participate, but the capacity to do so. Underpinning ABC Open's objectives is the narrowing of the digital divide between regional and urban Australians. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the digital divide is not just about unequal access to technology, but a sense of capacity to negotiate the online environment and a sense of purpose in doing so.

Therefore some investigation of the capability of participants to engage with participatory media seemed relevant to my research. Further reading led me to explore social capital as a lense for understanding the kind of connectedness which could be a pre-requisite for engagement in participatory media production.

These themes finally came together to form my research question: *What are the*

motivations for and outcomes of participatory media production in the context of the national public service broadcaster in a time of digital transformation?

Areas of inquiry into this question revolve around the impact of technology, the motivations for participation and the role of offline community as a pre-requisite for online engagement. And underpinning this question is the context of the ABC, the role of the ABC in invigorating the Australian community to create a more diverse and pluralistic representation of Australian life and for building local and nationally based democratic conversations.

1.5 Research objectives

This research intends to map out the consequences of a public service broadcaster engaging in participatory practices with its audience - for Australian citizens and for Australian national identity. It will focus on ABC Open contributors, their motivations and the outcomes of their involvement with ABC, in the context of public service broadcasting at a time when many of the practices and processes of traditional media production are being re-examined. To examine the research question I have employed a qualitative case study research methodology combining participant observation and in-depth interviews. Data collection has involved an immersion in the project through my role as ABC Open project director, over a period of four years since before the official launch of ABC Open until January 2014. Analysis has involved a process of data triangulation, using a variety of sources, theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches, which are further explored in Chapter 3.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is composed of eight chapters. This section will briefly outline Chapters 2 to 8.

Chapter 2 explores questions of place, community and network through the relevant literature and situates my research in the context of the present media environment, and the ongoing debate about the role and agency of the 'user'. Drawing on network and communication theory, I explore the way in which community has been invoked to describe online interactions, and the relevance of the community metaphor to user-generated

content. Chapter 2 explores the literature across a range of fields, including sociology, communication theory and psychology, including current theories on the motivations for participatory media practice on why and how audience members engage with online content creation and to consider the pre-conditions for participation in the framework of social capital and digital literacy. A key focus of this research is the question of localism. Chapter 2 also considers the relevance of geography to computer-mediated communication and the implications for locally produced content creation.

Chapter 3 outlines my methodological approach. This project seeks to capture both the dynamics of participatory media production and to provide an analysis of the social, political and institutional environment in which this production takes place. To that end, I have employed a qualitative case study approach, which has allowed me to describe this complexity and the nuances of the experiences of contributors to ABC Open. This approach is further described in Chapter 3, which also explores the challenges I have faced in the dual role of professional/researcher and the implications for this research project.

Chapters 4 to 6 present the data collected through a series of qualitative in-depth interviews with ABC Open contributors. These chapters are based around key themes that emerged through the literature and the research data, which include the effects of digital technologies on developing new forms of participatory practice, the motivations of contributors and the development of reinvigorated and new connections to local community.

Chapter 4 outlines some of the effects of new digital technologies on society and more specifically on the ABC and the 'active audience' it seeks to engage through ABC Open. This chapter outlines the ways in which Web 2.0 has created new practices, routines and opportunities for these research participants, both within and outside of the context of ABC Open. ABC Open contributors are part of the new group of 'producers' (Bruns, 2007) – some are active across a range of social and other media platforms, while others are newly engaged with the concept of creating content to share online. This chapter considers the wide-ranging effects of Web 2.0 technology on audience behaviour in the context of digital literacy and access.

Chapter 5 explores the motivations of participants to create and share content. This

chapter situates the experience of engaging in participatory media in a geographical context and shows how the context of both local community and a national media network affect the motivations of ABC Open contributors. In this chapter I will relate the field data to key motivational factors that are driven by the innate psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). I will also consider the importance of local stories and local connections created through ABC Open and the development of local connections offline.

These offline interactions are explored further in Chapter 6, which outlines notions of community (both online and offline) and explores how connection to community and social capital can affect online interactions. Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2002) suggest that social capital may be a prerequisite, not a consequence, of effective computer-mediated communication. The chapter then examines the pre-existing social capital of ABC Open contributors and the effects of participation on local communicative networks and relationships.

Chapter 7 provides the conclusion for the thesis. It will summarise the processes applied and the findings, and possibilities for future research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The study of participatory media is a fast moving field, reflecting the rapidly changing media and cultural environment. Indeed, a feature of the literature is that critical analysis of the nature and outcome of participation is also moving very quickly. Analysis which seemed highly relevant a decade ago might be challenged by the development of new platforms and modes of behaviour, and predictions about the future rarely come to pass in the way imagined. Some of the most recent analysis comes not only from academic research but from reports and online articles, some of which are considered in this chapter.

The study of both the motivations of participants and the effects of participation in the context of the 'crisis' in the media outlined in Chapter 1 involves a range of disciplines. In this chapter I have drawn on sociology, cultural and media studies, journalism, psychology, anthropology, education, political science and computer informatics as useful fields for understanding the complex relationship of motivation, agency, community and geography in a time of a media crisis and the effects of this participation on broader questions of the role of the national broadcaster. It is also worth noting that some of the scholars I have included in this chapter also adopt a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on many fields to explore the intersections of technology with society.

A wide body of research now exists which canvasses various aspects of the internet, including online group and individual behaviour and questions of community and society. While much has been made of the emergence of online communities, the term "networked individual" (Castells, 2000; Wellman, 2001) provides a more useful and accurate way to describe the way citizens are engaging with participatory media platforms – belonging to no one fixed group and able to develop according to their own needs.

These active networked participants, often referred to as 'users', create and distribute media content across a range of platforms, both commercial and non-commercial. Some scholars (Terranova, 2000; van Dijck, 2009) argue that these 'users' leave themselves open to exploitation by corporate interests. Despite this, and often with at least some knowledge

of the consequences, these participants freely engage in content creation for their own pleasure and its own reward (Terranova, 2000; Banks and Deuze, 2009).

The internet serves to help citizens/consumers connect with each other and contribute to cultural production. Yet the full promise of participatory media is far from being realized. Most internet users never participate (Nielsen, 2006) and for those that do, their interactions may be more precisely understood as access and interaction, not full democratic participation (Carpentier, 2011).

The extent to which people are able to access, interact and participate at any level, may, at least in part, be influenced by their levels of connectedness, both online and offline. The implications for democratic communication through the national public service media, and in this case through ABC Open, may be positive but they are also challenging. While this research project is neither blindly optimistic nor overly pessimistic about the promise of participatory digital media, these themes are further explored throughout this chapter.

2.2 Media convergence

The shift to a multichannel, multiplatform digital media environment changes the whole game.

Scott, 2008

This section explores the recent significant changes to media production models and the impact of these changes on both media organisations and their audiences, who now create as well as consume media content. Drawing primarily on media and cultural theory this section canvasses key arguments about the extent and consequences of participatory media models, with specific regard to the response of media companies.

Cultural theorist Henry Jenkins (2006) describes media convergence as being more than merely technological. According to Jenkins, media companies, which used to concentrate on one thing, have now diversified, while ownership of media companies has become more concentrated. Corporate conglomerates create and distribute content over various channels rather than a singular media platform. Audiences have become increasingly

migratory, and “will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (p. 2).

The opening up of new and increasingly global markets made possible through the internet has been acutely felt by media organizations, particularly news media. Newspaper businesses have been significantly challenged as declining advertising revenues have impacted on their business models (MacNamara, 2010). In the United States, the Pew Research Center’s (2013) *The State of the News Media* reported that newsrooms in the US had shrunk by 30% and the number of full-time journalists was the lowest it had been since 1978 (Pew, *State of the News Media*, 2013). The Pew report also recorded that 31% of respondents to its survey had deserted a news outlet because it no longer provided the news they were accustomed to.

Some newspapers in Australia have responded with staff cuts and pay walls. In June 2012, the Fairfax company announced it would shed 1900 staff and begin charging for content on its two leading metropolitan newspapers websites (Zapone, 2012). In the UK the BBC has also signalled job losses – 2,000 jobs by 2017 – to fulfil a savings target of 20% following a freeze on its license fee (BBC, 2011). As Peter Lee-Wright (2008) explains of the BBC:

Commercial competition and alternative delivery platforms are undermining their core audience, cultural fragmentation and political disengagement are depriving them of new audiences, and income cuts threaten not just their ability to respond to these new demands but to sustain their existing service standards. (Lee-Wright, 2008, pp.249-50).

While there is some debate about whether or not these developments represent a true crisis, and the extent to which media organisations have been, or will be, able to adapt (Franklin, 2012), the move to online publication has brought significant changes to their operations.

Yet it is clear that these changes present real challenges to media organizations. At the same time emergence of Web 2.0 has also created a fundamental shift in the way audiences consume and use media. Web 2.0 has been described by Matthew Allen (2008) as a conceptual frame, encompassing the design and function of web services, the creation

of new business models, more active and engaged internet users and a politics of participation which emphasizes freedom and empowerment (Allen, 2008, paras. 6-9).

The interactive possibilities now afforded through the internet have, according to Jenkins, led to the emergence of participatory cultures:

Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands. (Jenkins, 2006, p.3)

Yet while Jenkins describes participation as “the social and cultural interactions that occur around media”, (2006, p. 305) media theorist Nico Carpentier (2011) argues that the concept of participation may have been overstretched, and seeks a clearer definition. Placing participation within the framework of democratic theory, he argues that in both institutionalized politics and broader societal fields, participation is about power, and is always situated in particular processes and localities involving particular actors (Carpentier, 2011, pp. 24-25).

Carpentier draws the distinction between access, interaction and participation. Access, he argues, is about achieving presence, both in terms of access to technology and within media organizations. This access is often tightly controlled by media organizations, and generally includes the opportunity to provide feedback and comment. Interaction refers to the establishment of socio-communicative relationships in “the construction of meaning through lived and intersubjective experiences embodied in language. In these sociologies the social is shaped by actors interacting on the basis of shared interests, purposes and values, or common knowledge” (Carpentier, 2011, p. 29). Participation is located in the power relations associated with decision-making – both content related and structural. Participation then involves not just talking back to media, but having control over media production and even organizational decision-making.

A vast range of this online audience activity, including access, interaction and participation, has been gathered under the term user-generated content. McKenzie et al. (2012), in a review of user-generated content conducted in June 2012, demonstrate just how broadly this term is applied. The term includes content created through collaborative production,

e.g. open-source software and wikis; the development of small scale tools, e.g. software modification, mobile apps and tools for use in online games; and creative multimedia content found in blogs, citizen journalism and social media sites. Within these three overarching categories, there are myriad variations (McKenzie et al. 2012).

The development of UGC has been heralded by many as, if not a revolution, then certainly a seismic shift. In 2006, Jay Rosen, Professor of Journalism at New York University wrote a much celebrated blog post, 'The People Formerly Known As the Audience', in which he told the media:

We're not on your clock any more. Tom Curley, CEO of the Associated Press, has explained this to his people. "The users are deciding what the point of their engagement will be - what application, what device, what time, what place. We graduate from wanting media when we want it, to wanting it without the filler, to wanting media to be way better than it is, to publishing and broadcasting ourselves when it meets a need or sounds like fun. (Rosen, 2006)

While the term 'user' has become commonplace, it's also become a broad catch-all for people partaking in a wide range of activities, as listed above. Some scholars believe that the advent of the user has dramatically shifted the power dynamics of cultural production (Leadbeater and Miller, 2004; Rosen, 2006; Shirky, 2008) while others (Martin, 2002; Deuze, 2007; van Dijck, 2009) are more circumspect about the real power the user can wield.

It is within this context that some media organizations have attempted to embrace the 'active audience'. A Reuters Institute study of five major international news media organisations (BBC, CNN, *The New York Times*, *the Guardian* and the UK *Telegraph*) noted that "UGC and social media are now considered strategically central to the development of these organizations" (Newman, 2009, p. 22).

Newman's study identified 10 types of UGC in use by these media agencies: message boards, comments on stories, news UGC, non-news UGC, blogs, reader blogs, user-generated data, user questions, social network functionality and off-site engagement. Tracking the development of this community participation, he outlined three distinct phases - the first phase, from 1995, included the emergence of message boards and

community-building on media sites; 2001 saw the rise of blogging; and from 2006 social media and social networks began to impact on these media operations. He concluded that “we are seeing an unprecedented growth in the amount of participation on mainstream websites, allied to an explosion in self-expression on third party sites” (Newman, 2009, p50).

As Newman’s Reuters Institute study revealed, large international brands have been actively pursuing audience interaction with their websites for some time. In an early examination of the approach of three news organisations to participatory news, Deuze, Bruns and Neuberger (2007) write that the move to incorporate UGC can be seen as having several purposes for these organizations. While all recognise the value the audience can bring in terms of news leads and content (e.g.video footage and/or photos), the increase in competition has driven these organizations to explore new ways to create and maintain brand loyalty. Deuze, Bruns & Neuberger (2007) see this as an:

an example of both top-down (industry-driven) customer-relationship management efforts and labor cost-cutting measures, as well as of bottom-up processes of individual and collective self-expression in the context of a post materialist (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005), participatory (Bucy & Gregson, 2001), and exceedingly digital culture (Deuze, 2006). (Deuze, Bruns & Neuberger, 2007, p. 322)

They argue that convergence culture-based participatory news sites:

tend to emerge from institutions and organizations with a strong public service agenda or a strong connection to clearly defined local or interest communities, or are set up by commercial news organizations which see a thorough embrace of participatory journalism models as a clear competitive advantage in a shrinking market for journalistic work. (Deuze, Bruns & Neuberger, 2007, p324)

The BBC, as a public service broadcaster, was an early proponent of the benefits of engaging with its audience. As early as 1993 (before Web 2.0) the BBC invited audience members, through its Video Nation project, to record their lives and create video diaries, initially for television broadcast. In 2001 the project went online, increasing the number of stories created and published (BBC, 2013; Carpentier, 2003).

In 2001 the BBC also embarked on a digital storytelling project, Capture Wales, which ran workshops for participants (Meadows & Kidd, 2009). This project was based on a digital storytelling model, developed by the Californian Center for Digital Storytelling, which has been widely taken up by cultural institutions and community development organisations (Hartley & Mc William, 2009). Digital storytelling is “a workshop based practice in which people are taught to use digital media to create short audio-video stories, usually about their own lives” (Hartley & Mc William, 2009, p. 3), or as Daniel Meadows, the creator of the Capture Wales project describes it, “and elegant and economic means of self-representation based on personal collections of still photographs coupled with a voice-over narration” (Meadows & Kidd, 2009, p. 91).

Capture Wales concluded in 2008 (BBC, 2013), and the Video Nation project was discontinued as part of the BBC’s online re-structure following budget cuts in 2011 (BBC, 2011a). However, since 2005 the BBC has invested heavily in its UGC Hub to process and authenticate audience material as well as to engage more deeply with audience members to co-create content, write articles and shoot photo series. In an average week, the team processes over 10,000 email comments, 1000 stills and up to 100 video clips. The hub also acts as a broker and adviser to television and radio programs looking for case studies and audience contributions, answering around 20 queries a day from across the BBC (Newman, 2009, p. 7).

In 2008, Cardiff University researchers Claire Wardle and Andrew Williams traced the impact of user-generated content at the BBC on contributors and non-contributors, and the organisation itself. Their survey of the BBC’s ventures into UGC showed a range of services, including audience blogs, forums and a civic space, iCan (later renamed the BBC Action Network), where the BBC hoped people would “share concerns, build communities of interest, exchange information and advice and plan and organise campaigns” (Wardle & Williams, 2008, p. 6).

The Guardian has also been an advocate of increased audience participation. In 2006 it launched ‘Comment is Free’, a part of its site which brought together regular columnists from *The Guardian* and *The Observer* with other writers and an active online community (Newman, 2009, p. 13.) Newman noted that the Guardian was one of the first to embrace social media tools into journalistic workflows. Newman also noted that *The Guardian* was

at that time exploring new models of participation. Since then *The Guardian* has pursued a range of different models for participation under the umbrella term of ‘open journalism’, in which, according to Editor Alan Rusbridger, *The Guardian* has attempted to harness multiple views to “get a more complete version of the truth” (Ellis, 2012). At the time of writing, these include methods which allow audience members to contribute to developing stories (*The Guardian* n.d.) as well as Guardian Witness, a new webpage and mobile app launched in 2013, which collects and publishes audience created photos, recipes and stories (Indvick, 2013).

However, some media organizations have pulled back from their early enthusiasm. Newman writes that CNN’s, *Ireport*, developed to capture citizen news, also invited unruly debates, and a challenge to the credibility of CNN as an international news brand. *Ireport* now operates as a separate platform, distinguished from its master brand.

Across Europe, initial high expectations for participatory journalism by new media organizations have not, on the whole, been met. Bakker’s (2012) review of audience participation, with a particular emphasis on public service media, found that very few people are interested in interacting with news media, and that when they do their participation is not always seen by media professionals as having value (Bakker, 2012, p. 237). When media organizations do allow audience participation, it “doesn’t come cheap – neither in terms of financial investment nor in terms of human effort – meaning that it is mainly an option for organizations that value audience contributions beyond their financial value” (Bakker, 2012, p. 250).

In Australia, scholarly analysis of audience interaction with public service media organizations has primarily been framed in terms of its potential to reinvent the public service remit in the face of ongoing threats to its relevance and even existence. An increasing body of work, referenced later in this chapter, explores the possibilities for extending democratic participation, citizenship and diversity through online participation in, and interaction with, Australian public service media organizations, including both the ABC and SBS (McClean, 2011; Martin, 2002; Flew 2011; DeBrett, 2010; Given & Radwyl, 2013). The work of Martin and Burns, which explores the transition of the ABC from broadcaster to online publisher during the late 1990s and into the early years of the 21st

century (Burns, 2000; 2002 & 2008) and Martin (2002; 2007), sets a useful context for this more recent body of research.

A handful of scholars have also turned their attention to the consequences of audience participation with the ABC. Martin (2012) interrogates the limits of audience participation with the ABC through an examination of different types of interaction, including the live web forums held after the high profile TV current affairs program *Four Corners*, the discussion hub *Self Service Science* and the highly moderated opinion site *Unleashed*, analysing how the risks of interaction with the audience have been perceived by staff. These risks have included legal, ethical and technical concerns and even risks to personal safety as well as potential risks to the reputation of the organization itself (Martin, 2012 p. 182).

The experience of audience interaction from the period 1995 to 2010 led to a range of institutional responses, including a discussion paper about user-generated content (ABC, 2008) and the development of institutional guidelines for moderating UGC (ABC, 2011). Martin concludes that the rhetoric of participation does not always match with the lived reality. Her work examining interactivity on ABC websites reveals an uneasy relationship between the audience and ABC staff, who sometimes perceive audience members as unruly and disruptive, and lacking in both editorial judgement and ethical standards (Martin, 2004; 2012).

Given & Radywyl's (2013) more recent observation of the ABC's interactive television program *Q&A* and its experience with Twitter integration reveals that ABC staff fear of the unruliness of the audience has to some extent subsided (Given & Radywyl, 2013, p. 18). Cultural studies professor Gay Hawkins (2013) has also examined *Q&A* to explore potential theoretical approaches to questions of public value, in light of recent criticisms about the worth of public service media. She analyses the live broadcast of the program's Twitter feed to investigate how public reason and rational discussion are enacted and disrupted, and concludes that Twitter in this context has become a device for materialising a very different sort of 'public'.

Rutherford and Brown (2013) focus on ABC3, the multiplatform channel for children and young adults. They argue that the participation of audiences through this channel (which

includes both television programs and an interactive website) has created market competition for Australian children's content where none had previously existed. Thus the ABC has been able to not only drive participation as a cultural and citizen-building objective, but has also created a strong and popular brand for its services.

A recent doctoral thesis by Jonathon Hutchinson (2013) investigates the effects of participation on the ABC through the ABC's online platform *Pool*. His work primarily focuses on the effects on the role of cultural intermediaries, including the community manager and radio producers who engaged with Pool contributors in collaborative media production until its closure in 2013. Hutchinson's work is highly interesting; however my research focuses on the effects on participants whereas Hutchinson's inquiry is centred on the institutional challenges for the ABC and the role of cultural intermediaries it employs to engage with citizens.

Clearly, as Deuze, Bruns & Neuberger (2007) outline, models for participation in mainstream media are still "under construction":

This convergence of industrial and participatory journalism cultures does not occur in a uniform, painless process - nor does it occur in a vacuum. Coping with the emergence of hybrid producer-user forms of newswork is easier for some than for others, and tends to clash with entrenched notions of professionalism, objectivity, and carefully cultivated arrogance regarding the competences (or talent) of "the audience" to know what is good for them. (Deuze, Bruns & Neuberger, 2007, pp. 333-4)

Yet Banks and Deuze (2009) argue consumer co-creative participation today is part of life for media professionals, whether they like it or not:

The success of media production may increasingly rely on effectively combining and coordinating the various forms of expertise possessed by both professional media workers and creative citizen-consumers, not displacing one with the other. This requires media companies to both recognize and respect the contribution of media consumers' expertise in the context of a co-creative relationship for mutual benefit. (Banks and Deuze, 2009, p. 422)

Clearly, as the literature shows, media institutions have in many cases had to catch up with the rapid behavioural changes of audiences occurring as a result of Web 2.0 interactivity.

The challenges for the public service remit of national public service media organizations are taken up further in this chapter in Section 2.8. In the next section, however, I turn to the broader social implications of these technologies and the effects on online engagement on individuals.

2.3 Virtual community to networked individualism

There is a wide range of literature dealing with the effects of the internet on individuals and society. This section draws on cultural theory, sociology and media geography to trace the evolution of key descriptive terms which have been used to refer to online engagement: from 'community' (Rheingold, 1994), to 'network' (Wellman, 2001; Castells, 2005), to 'participatory culture' (Jenkins, 2006; Shirky, 2008, 2010).

Increased online engagement by audiences, whether for media companies or other brands, has become a kind of Holy Grail in the Web 2.0 era. This engagement is often thought of in terms of community, and advice abounds about how to build and maintain communities online.

Yet the use of the term community in an online context is highly contested. The term 'virtual community' was first coined by Howard Rheingold (1994) whose influential book, *The Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerised World*, described these communities as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on ... public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationship in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 1994, p. 5).

Virtual communities exist parallel to those that exist IRL (in real life). They grow "as the colonies of microorganisms that grow in petri dishes" and "wherever CMC technology becomes available to people anywhere, they inevitably build virtual communities with it, just as microorganisms inevitably create colonies" (Rheingold, 1994, p. 6).

Rheingold's broad notion of 'virtual community' was in stark contrast to earlier conceptualizations of community, which for the most part described community in terms of geographic location and/or family connection. In Rheingold's virtual community, people

could form these relationships around ideas or activities, and were no longer bound by their physical location or social background.

This term also provided a useful framework for many scholars to counter some of the dystopian visions which were prevalent at the about the social effects of the internet. When William Gibson first described “cyberspace” as a distinct conceptual space, he was met with two broad responses (Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2002; Wellman and Hampton, 2002). One was utopian, where offline social restrictions and boundaries were no longer critical, and a more authentic self could be realized. Through online interactions individuals are able to explore multiple identities, and are able to transcend their physical, social, economic and political circumstances to meet in a space where only the mind matters (Turkle, 1995).

The second predicted a loss of community and sociability through internet use, or even the potential for emotional harm (Dibbell, 1993). As the internet became more and more absorbed into everyday life, new fears emerged. Social scientist Sherry Turkle, while initially identifying the potential for the virtual worlds of the internet to provide positive psychological outcomes for its users (Turkle, 1995), has more recently turned her attention to the negative effects of an increasingly interconnected world, including the lack of ability to disconnect, to live an unobserved life, and to quietly reflect (Turkle, 2007). More pressing dangers have been well canvassed in the popular press, particularly in relation to chat room predators and adults posing as children (Topping, 2008; *Science Daily*, 2009).

The community metaphor was important in pushing back against dystopian views which saw the internet as a socially isolating phenomenon. It allowed a different view to come into focus, one where internet relationships could be meaningful and constructive and that, far from harming people, they could help keep people stay connected to society.

These 1990s discussions, and use of the word ‘community’, are put into context by Rowan Wilken, who has further explored the meaning of community and geography in an online context. Wilken (2011) examines the evolution of ideas of community, from the late 1700s to recent times, and the widespread adoption of the term to describe many kinds of computer-mediated interactions. While a thorough discussion of the meaning of community is a topic for another research project, Wilken’s work is useful in terms of

understanding how the idea of virtual community, and now online communities, became so strong in the vernacular.

Community is a term about which there is much assumed knowledge, but which in reality may mean many different things. "As a concept", Wilken writes, "it tends to be intuitively grasped, but proves far more elusive to define" (Wilken, 2011, p. 29). In Wilken's sketch of pre-internet ideas of community, he describes the conflict between the values of community and individualism as cyclical, swinging from favouring one set of values to the other and swinging back again. The idea of community is often associated with a kind of paradise lost, a yearning for another time. He writes that throughout the twentieth century, community has been seen as both threatened and resilient, at once lost and re-gained (Wilken, 2011, pp. 29-30)

Pre-internet communities were often thought of as being based on kin or locality. As part of his inquiry, Wilken discusses the work of George Hillery, who in 1955 conducted a landmark study of definitions of the term. Even in the mid 1950s, Hillery found only one commonality between all the conceptions of community – that is, that all definitions relate to people. In examining Hillery's research, however, Wilken highlights an emphasis on three factors, which are, in order of importance "geographic area, common ties, and social interaction" (Wilken, 2011, p. 40).

Yet Wilken points out that, even in the 1950s, geography was not always relevant to definitions of community. He writes that in 1957, sociologist William Goode, while studying professional communities, developed an eight-point criteria to describe the characteristics of groups. Goode described professional communities as those bound by a sense of identity, with common values and a common language only partially understood by outsiders; with agreed upon role definitions which are the same for all members; and with reasonably clear limits, although they are "not physical and geographical, but social" (Wilken 2011, p. 42). The lack of emphasis on physicality and geography has much in common with online communities.

However, in Goode's list two other criteria also exist which have less commonality with online groups: that the community has power over its membership, and that once people join these communities, few leave. Despite this, Goode's definition, according to Wilken,

gives some context to the description of computer-mediated communication networks as communities. The emphasis on social interaction and common ties are more important than location, indeed geography is the least crucial element.

It is clear that well before Rheingold's assertion of the 'virtual community', the importance of locality in the concept of community had started to diminish. Wilken argues that community became a catch-all for any kind of interaction on the internet - that virtual community sounded good and seemed like a 'good fit' (Wilken, 2011, p. 115).

However, despite its popularity, the usefulness of the term to describe the activities of people in online groups has been widely debated by scholars (Daugherty et al. 2005). Etzioni and Etzioni, writing in 1999, find that community is "sometimes used to refer to tightly knit social groups, and in other occasions to signify aggregates of people who hardly know one another; sometimes it even is used to describe mere geographic places" (Etzioni and Etzioni 1999, p. 242).

With some consensus emerging that the term community is not such a good fit, a more useful terminology emerged through the work of sociologists Barry Wellman (2001) and Manuel Castells (2000), which situated online participants as networked individuals rather than members of bonded groups. In this analysis, individuals are not members of single, tightly knit groups, but are at the centre of a set of personal networks. Networked individualism situates people in a variety of networks, including locally based ones, and geographically dispersed ones – these can include family, friends and colleagues, and communities of interest.

Reviewing his position, Howard Rheingold himself agrees that 'online social networks' might better describe the reality of computer-mediated communication:

If I had encountered sociologist Barry Wellman and learned about social network analysis when I first wrote about cyberspace cultures, I could have saved us all a decade of debate by calling them 'online social networks' instead of 'virtual communities'. (Rheingold, 2006, p. 47)

Media scholar Henry Jenkins (2006) describes these online social networks not as communities but as knowledge cultures. Writing about fan behaviour in online groups he

asserts that these emerging knowledge cultures are voluntary, temporary and tactical affiliations:

Because they are voluntary, people do not remain in communities that no longer meet their emotional or intellectual needs. Because they are temporary, these communities form and disband with relative flexibility. Because they are tactical, they tend not to last beyond the tasks that set them in motion. (Henry Jenkins, 2006, p. 57)

The fluidity of online groups is in stark contrast to earlier conceptualizations of community. Participants in online groups might share some values, but membership lasts only as long as each individual member requires it to.

This point is taken up by Harvard Law Professor Yochai Benkler (2006), who sees this as positive, increasing the opportunities for individual autonomy and agency:

The very fluidity and low commitment required of any given cooperative relationship increases the range and diversity of cooperative relations people can enter, and therefore of collaborative projects they can perceive of as open to them. (Benkler, 2006, p. 9)

Benkler describes collaborative work engaged in by citizens through online platforms as 'commons-based peer production':

The networked environment makes possible a new modality of organizing production: radically decentralized, collaborative, and non-proprietary; based on sharing resources and outputs among widely distributed, loosely connected individuals who cooperate with each other without relying on either market signals or managerial commands. (Benkler, 2006, p. 60)

He argues that the networked information environment allows individuals a much greater role in authoring their own lives, by enabling them to perceive a greater range of possibilities for themselves, and by providing them with "a richer baseline against which to measure the choices they in fact make" (Benkler, 2006, p. 9).

The new range of online tools has allowed online social networks to flourish. Clay Shirky is a prominent writer on the practices and effects of participatory media. Shirky (2008) asserts

that the collapse of transaction costs have allowed people to organise in ways which are changing how we behave and think about group activity. He argues that previously organisations were the main drivers of activity and change, but they are now becoming less effective than loosely affiliated groups operating with no hierarchy or managerial direction.

Similarly, in Benkler's analysis, the active individual is able to participate in a networked public sphere, to "inject a thought, a criticism, or a concern into the public debate" (Benkler, 2006, p. 10). This ability to freely participate in the online networked public sphere situates the 'active' audience not as a defined group but as individuals who participate in social networks in ways which suit their own purposes. In this context, Shirky argues, the separation of real life and cyberspace simply no longer holds:

The old worldview of online as a separate space, cyberspace, apart from the real world, was an accident of history. Back when the online population was tiny, most of the people you knew in your daily life weren't part of that population. Now that computers and increasingly computerlike phones have been broadly adopted, the whole notion of cyberspace is fading. Our social media tools are not an alternative to real life, they are part of it. (Shirky, 2010, p. 37)

The following section further explores the consequences of this convergence of online and offline life, and takes up some of the key debates about the political and economic effects of these new kinds of cultural consumption and production.

2.4 Labour and agency

We now live in, rather than with the media.

Bolin, 2012, p. 800

The increasingly blurry lines between media production and consumption that Bolin refers to has led to one of the more lively discussions over the effects of digitisation. A number of media scholars have sought to theorise the role of the creative consumer/citizen, asking the question: who is using who in the participatory media paradigm? This section explores the primary arguments about whether participants are being exploited by these media

practices, or whether these models can be theorised beyond the categories of work and leisure.

Some scholars (Terranova, 2000; Van Dijck, 2009) question the balance between creative participation and exploitation by companies, even if consumers are willing participants in the process. Others argue in favour of developing new ways to conceptualise labour relations in a digitised world (Leadbeater and Miller, 2004; Bruns, 2007).

Author and former editor of the influential magazine, *Wired*, Chris Anderson (2005) has both engaged in and observed the blurring of the distinction between ‘professional’ producers and ‘amateurs’. In his blog, *The Long Tail* (2005), he writes:

We make not just what we're paid to make, but also what we want to make. Both can have value. Once, with high barriers to marketplace entry, only the professional work found an audience. But now those barriers are dropping. (Anderson, 2005, para. 1)

There are many kinds of digital content that have been conceptualized as work. Terranova, in the much discussed article, ‘Free Labour: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy’ (2000) describes the digital economy as not just about web design and production, but also “about forms of labor we do not immediately recognize as such: chat, real-life stories, mailing lists, amateur newsletters and so on” (Terranova, 2000, p. 38). Other scholars add to this list open source software and contribution to wikis (Benkler, 2006), and blogs, photo sharing and social media (Scholtz, 2008).

Terranova conceptualises this production as free labour, where people create benefit for corporations through willingly participating in the creation of digital artefacts that in turn can drive the creation of profits for digital companies. Media theorist Trebor Scholz (2008) summarises it as: “The web makes people easier to use” (Scholtz, 2008, para. 30). He describes how users of social networking sites freely give away information about themselves through their user profiles, providing a “playground and laboratory for marketers” (Scholtz, 2008, para. 26).

Van Dijck (2009) extends her inquiry into user agency, and includes other kinds of content which consumers may not even realise they are contributing to, for example, the collection

of personal data which can be sold to commercial or other entities. She writes that the act of participation is not just about creating content to be viewed by others but also includes (knowingly or unknowingly) partaking in activities which situate a person as a consumer, and allow corporations to more easily target and gain economic value from these very participants.

The paradox of these arguments is the willing participation of consumers and citizens. Terranova notes that while these activities are on the one hand “shamelessly exploited” (2004, p. 216) they are also pleasurably embraced. Framing this activity in terms of neoliberalism, Jarrett (2008) argues that interactivity is a disciplining technology. She contends that the user who engages in these kinds of online participatory practices is “being shaped into, or reinforced as, the active, entrepreneurial citizen of neoliberalism” (Jarrett, 2008, para. 19). She describes the technology of Web 2.0 as seductive – while appearing as free choice and pleasure it deliberately masks the power and control it exerts.

Bolin (2012) poses the question: why would people work for free? He attempts to understand media as both as an activity that media users engage in, benefit from and value the use of, and as an activity that is then used by others for other, mainly economic, ends. Yet Banks and Deuze (2009) question the premise that non-professional creators are unaware of the economic consequences of their activity:

These critical approaches often position consumer participants as in some sense unaware that their participation is a productive practice from which economic value is extracted. If the participants express their pleasure or enjoyment in these exchanges this is then cited as just further evidence of their seduction in which the affective works to perhaps even more effectively entangle consumers in these webs of corporate servitude (Banks and Deuze, 2009, pp. 424-5).

However, Banks and Deuze argue against the critical stance of scholars such as Jarrett (2008) and Scholz (2008) who, they say, elevate the scholarly role above that of the hapless participant, ignoring the potential for both consumers and media professionals to explore the possibilities for participatory empowerment and emancipation. They argue that these scholars need to pay more attention to the meaning that these co-creative consumers themselves give to these activities, and that “we perhaps also need to consider how these

activities and their meanings can be understood parallel to (or beyond) categories such as work and labour” (Banks & Deuze, 2009, p. 426).

Some scholars (Leadbeater & Miller, 2004; Bruns, 2007) have attempted to do this by describing new roles for those who engage with media not in an entirely professional, nor entirely amateur, capacity. “Pro-ams”, according to Leadbeater and Miller, are “a new social hybrid...amateurs working to professional standards whose activities aren’t adequately captured by the traditional definitions of work and leisure, professional and amateur, production and consumption (Leadbeater and Miller, 2004, p20).

Bruns (2007) describes a more broadly based, growing trend towards the mainstreaming of what he calls ‘produsage’. Using examples including the media sharing platforms (such as YouTube, Flickr and ccmixter.com), and game design, he describes an increasing resistance to top-down models of production. While he observes a range of models, from those that creatively empower ‘producers’ to those that ruthlessly exploit them, Bruns argues that it is possible to develop ethical models of harnessing rather than hijacking produsage artifacts, including aggregation, filtering and hosting for produsage communities and projects.

However, whether these models are equitable or exploitative, the participation of individuals relies on their motivation to engage. The following section explores the literature regarding human motivation and its relevance to participatory media practice.

2.5 Participant motivation

Whether it is conceived of as Pro-Am, produsage or free labour, a key question for my research project is: what motivates people to participate in these forms of cultural production?

The evolving study of the motivations that drive people to create user-generated content crosses a range of disciplines, including psychology, law, management studies, marketing and advertising and media and cultural theory. Various forms of motivation theory - uses and gratification theory, functional theory, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and self-determination theory - have been employed by researchers.

While I will touch on some of these approaches in this section, my research has primarily focused on the theory of self-determination, developed by psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. While other methods may be highly appropriate to understanding co-creative practices in online video games, or consumer responses to brands, this theoretical approach seemed to provide the best framework for understanding the continuing practice of creating rich media content.

Human motivation has long been a source of academic investigation. Deci's 1975 work into the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation has been key to our understanding of the psychological drives that motivate human behaviour. McKenzie et al. (2012) summarise the basics well. Intrinsic motivations are those that stem directly from the task itself, and include the motivation to do something because it is interesting, satisfying or fun, while extrinsic motivations relate to the consequences of completing the task, and include monetary reward and reputational enhancement (McKenzie et al. 2012, p. 7).

Deci and Ryan (2000) contend that that extrinsic factors are less robust motivators than intrinsic factors, and that a 'carrot and stick' approach, once thought to be common sense, is in fact counterproductive. They argue that motivational strategies, such as rewards, undermine autonomy and decrease creativity and intrinsic motivation. These scholars (Deci & Ryan: 1985; 2000: Ryan & Deci, 2000) understand motivation in terms of meeting innate psychological needs, which they differentiate from the pursuit of goals. According to their self-determination theory:

a critical issue in the effects of goal pursuit and attainment concerns the degree to which people are able to satisfy their basic psychological needs as they pursue and attain their valued outcomes. (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p 227)

These essential and innate needs are identified as autonomy, competence and relatedness, and they argue that:

[I]ntrinsically motivated behaviors, which are performed out of interest and satisfy the innate psychological needs for competence and autonomy are the prototype of self-determination. (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 65)

More recently, the author Daniel Pink (2009) has popularized the theory of self determination through his book, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. Building on Deci and Ryan's theory, he describes the key factors which motivate humans as autonomy, mastery and purpose. He argues firstly that the default setting of humans is to be autonomous and self-directed, and that there is a deep desire to control our own lives. The second of the innate desires in Pink's analysis is mastery, the urge to continue to get better at things that matter. And the third is purpose, the yearning to be of service, and to be involved in something larger than ourselves.

Shirky (2008) reframes these concepts as knowledge, vanity and usefulness. In examining the online collaborative website Wikipedia, he observed three motivating factors that drove people to participate: knowledge (I know how to do it), vanity (I can do it better than other people) and usefulness (I can help other people by doing it). He argues that the desire to contribute is a strong one, made more so when people feel they are part of something bigger, and to some extent when they feel they are doing things which are in the public good.

Further to this Shirky (2010) has developed the concept of 'cognitive surplus', whereby the build up of free time in the post industrialised world has created an environment where people now engage in tasks which once might have been seen as work for their own intrinsic pleasure and satisfaction. He cites examples from LOL cats (Shirky, 2010, p. 282/4706) to the crisis-mapping platform Ushahidi (Shirky, 2010, p. 246/4706) to demonstrate the innate human desire to share, whether for entertainment and pleasure or for greater civic aims.

While the framework of self-determination theory is useful, other theoretical approaches also bear relevance to my research. McKenzie et al.'s 2012 survey of user-generated content describes various findings from the literature which demonstrate the complex interaction between internal and external motivational factors across a broad range of contribution types. The literature they have surveyed includes many differing theoretical perspectives which they have synthesized under the framework of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. In general they find that intrinsic factors are more present for those engaged in collaborative work, while extrinsic rewards, including money and reputation enhancement, are more important for individual contributors.

However, the extrinsic motivational factor of reputation enhancement has been identified by a range of other researchers. The proliferation of sites that provided advice and reviews in the early 2000s, and the further development of tools which allow online content to be reviewed and rated by audiences have led to what some refer to as a reputation economy. Rheingold (2002) frames this in terms of ego-gratification:

A few contributors earned the kind of currency banks accept. Most contributed for the social recognition that came with being a top-ranked reviewer. The 'reputation managers' that enabled users and other recommenders to rate each other made possible opinion markets that traded almost entirely on ego gratification. (Rheingold, 2002, p 119)

Reputation has been identified as a motivation for continued involvement in a range of online networks, including in the area of open-source programming, and the creation of blogs (Hsu & Lin, 2008), commenting on online sites (Marrett & Joshi, 2009) and citizen journalism (Barrett and Willis, 2003).

Yet overall McKenzie et al. report that in many studies of user-generated content, reputation is "at best a negligible predictor of contribution...and contributors tend to endorse other motivation over the goal of enhancing their personal or professional reputations" (McKenzie et al. 2012, p. 9).

Understanding the motivations of participants is crucial in terms of analysing the case of ABC Open and the practices engaged in by the ABC to facilitate online interaction. There are many possible frameworks for exploring these motivations, yet even within each of these frameworks current research shows that different kinds of online participation are driven by differing motivational factors. In choosing the framework of self-determination theory I have sought to investigate whether the key intrinsic factors identified by Deci and Ryan - autonomy, competence and relatedness - are present for ABC Open contributors. As well as this, the question of reputation may have some relevance. These themes are taken up further in Chapter 5.

The motivation of participants is crucial, so too is their ability to participate. This chapter explored some of the technological pre-conditions for engagement. However, the *social*

capacity to engage is also important. The following section explores the extent to which existing social connectedness may be a pre-requisite for engagement.

2.6 Digital literacy, participation and social capital

In a convergent media environment, the ability to understand and make use of new technologies is seen by many policy makers and scholars as crucial for the enablement of an active citizenry, the development of an economically productive population and for individual personal fulfilment and cultural expression (Livingstone, Van Couvering & Thumim, 2008). This ability to fully engage in the digital society has been framed in terms of literacy, participation and social capital, encompassing questions of access to technologies and the skills to make use of them, the socio-cultural dynamics of online spaces, and the potential for the internet to connect, rather than divide, people in communities. In the following section I draw on education, information, media and cultural studies to first examine concepts of literacy, or *literacies*, as an important underpinning to questions of participation. I will then explore the notion of social capital as a pre-condition to online participation.

Concerns about the digital divide stem from the early days of personal computing, when much attention was focused on “computer literacy”, and universal access to computers was seen as an important policy outcome. From the 1990s, however, scholars in the field of education and information studies have sought to explore varying definitions of literacy to take into account the development and uses of new communication technologies, shifting the emphasis from access, to skills acquisition, and then to a more nuanced concept of the attitudes, perspectives and critical thinking required to be a digitally literate person (Bawdin, 2008). Media and cultural theorists have also sought to understand the changing ways we engage with media technologies, as these technologies become more and more computerized and computers are able to contain and distribute more and more media content (Livingstone, van Couvering and Thumim, 2008).

Paul Gilster (1997), although not the first to use the term digital literacy, has been influential in steering attention away from operational definitions to the more conceptual framework of digital literacy. In his 1997 book, *Digital Literacy*, Gilster identified literacy as more than just the ability to use the functions of digital technology. Digital literacy is a mindset, he writes, and “is about mastering ideas, not keystrokes” (Gilster, 1997, pp 1-2).

Lankshear and Knobel (2008) describe digital literacy as a shorthand “for the myriad social practices and conceptions of engaging in meaning making mediated by texts that are produced, received, distributed, exchanged etc., via digital codification” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008, p. 5). Digital literacy is understood as social practice, as being able to adapt and understand the different meaning of different texts and media. Lankshear and Knobel (2008) have argued for an recognition of the plurality of digital literacy, and a re-thinking of the field in terms of digital literacies, contending that these literacies are embedded in social practices, and that texts are part of “*lived, talked, enacted, value-and-belief-laden* practices carried out in specific places at specific times (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008, p. 7).

The argument for a plurality of digital literacies is taken up by Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu (2008), who note that in a time of rapid socio-technological change it is no longer possible to be fully literate in every technology. They argue that “research questions on the new technologies of the internet take place in contexts that are far too complex for any single perspective to account for all that is taking place” (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu 2008, p. 12).

Livingstone, van Couvering and Thumim (2008) have, however, sought to draw together the traditions of information and media literacy, arguing that as traditional media forms converge with telecommunications, computing and information systems, the traditions for understanding literacy also need to converge. They do, however, recognise important similarities and differences. Within media studies, they note, some differences of opinion exist about whether media literacy should be conceived as individual accomplishment or as social and cultural practice. However they note that policy makers are increasingly seeking to extend definitions of media literacy to cover new media and information technologies, and driven by critical policy objectives. They contend that debates over literacy are grounded in the struggle between those who see literacy as a democratizing force or as a source of inequality, and are really debates about the manner and purpose of public participation in society. “The promise of literacy”, they write, “is that it can form part of a strategy to reposition the media user – from passive to active, from recipient to participant, and from consumer to citizen” (Livingstone, van Couvering & Thumim, 2008, p. 126).

This emphasis on literacy as a fundamental characteristic of participation is further taken

up by Allan Martin (2008). He frames literacy in the context of a transformation from the “solid” to the “liquid” phase of modernity, “in which all social forms melt faster than new ones can be cast” (Martin, 2008, p. 153). In this context, the structures of modern life have become far less predictable, leaving a vacuum in which “the construction of individual identity has become the fundamental social act” (Martin, 2008, p. 153). Martin argues that the challenge for individuals is to regain some control of their own destinies and some involvement in the creation of meaning in society “by which the individual can retain a hold on the shape of his/her life in an era of increasing uncertainty” (Martin, 2008, p. 156).

Literacy, then, is no longer a static construct, but a “rapid and continuous process of change in the ways in which we read, write, view, listen, compose and communicate information” (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008, p. 5). The ability to participate is contingent on being able to acquire this literacy, hence the current widespread policy emphasis on literacy and continuing debate about the existence and nature of the “digital divide”.

While there is a wide body of literature exploring the nature and extent of the digital divide, Martin (2008) argues that new technologies merely add another dimension to inequalities which have long existed. Wellman (2011) also notes that “there are non-economic factors of social inequality – linked to skill and cultural capital – that strongly affect the structure of increasingly computerized societies and the life chances of their members” (Wellman, 2011, p.21). Jenkins (2006) describes this as a “participation gap”, (Jenkins, 2006, p.23) which can serve to include or exclude from participatory culture. Inclusion in participatory culture is dependent on a familiarity with new kinds of social interactions (Jenkins, 2006) and a set of social skills and cultural competencies which include play, performance, simulation, appropriation, multitasking, collective intelligence, judgement, transmedia navigation, networking and negotiation (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009). Yet inclusion in participatory culture depends not just on the acquisition of these digital literacies but also on whether the public is “sufficiently connected to civil society, not only to receive but also to produce and distribute content” (Livingstone, van Couvering & Thumim, 2008).

Connection to civil society and the relationship of social capital to online participation is an important dimension of my research. Despite early dystopian views that the internet would

limit social connection, a number of scholars contend that the internet merely reflects real life (Haythornthwaite & Kendall, 2010), or may even extend the potential of people to connect with one another (Wellman, Quan-Haase, Witte & Hampton, 2001). An increasing body of literature has explored the interaction between online and offline social capital, including whether the internet increases or decreases social capital, which kinds of social capital are most enhanced by the internet, and whether local connections are strengthened by communicating online. While much of the literature relates to direct communication (such as email) and social networking sites (primarily Facebook) the question of which leads – social capital or participation - is highly relevant.

The concept of social capital has been variously described as: the connections among individuals and the norms of reciprocity and trust that arise from social networks (Putnam, 2000), a resource for action that makes possible the achievement of certain ends that would not, in its absence, be possible (Coleman 1988) and social relationships that enable productive outcomes (Sum, Mathews, Pourghasem & Hughes, 2008).

Onyx and Bullen (2000) identify several components of social capital which are generally agreed upon in the literature, including sociability, reciprocity and trust. These concepts are also present in the literature about online communities. Preece (2000) identifies reciprocity as being a significant determinant of the success of online communities. Trust has been a key concern of online scholars, increasingly so since the rise of social media networks.

Central to the discussion of social capital is the distinction between bridging capital and bonding capital, two distinct forms of social capital which can lead to very different outcomes (Putnam 2000). Bonding capital, where people experience high levels of trust and reciprocity, and a high degree of member recognition, might also lead to the exclusion of outsiders. Bridging capital can broaden social horizons and bring new ideas and resources into a community (Onyx & Bullen, 2000). The ability to connect to those outside of one's close social group allows new ideas to enter into ones personal network. Put simply, without weak ties "life would be harder and less fun in many ways. Weaker ties multiply people's social capital, useful knowledge, ability to get things done" (Rheingold, 2006, p. 48).

Prior to the advent of social media, a number of scholars argued that the internet increased

social life and civic engagement. Barry Wellman's 1998 survey of online interactions found that the internet supports local relationships: nearby friends were contacted three times as often as those further away, and nearby kin were contacted twice as much as those further away. Wellman (2004) concluded that the internet extends community in the real world, connecting people through individualised and flexible social networks rather than fixed and grounded groups.

While scholars have argued over whether online activity increases or reduces social capital, Valenzuela et al. (2009) conclude that both hold true - that it is not the technology per se that affects social capital but the way people use it. They conducted a random web survey of college students in Texas who used Facebook, in order to examine the relationship between the intensity of Facebook use and students' life satisfaction, social trust, civic engagement, and political participation. Using uses and gratifications theory they found that Facebook helps with personal identity construction, and can fulfil the need for integration and social interaction. Their study found that while Facebook doesn't have a large effect on creating social capital it can contribute to it, and that increased participation can help build trusting relationships.

While much research has centred around whether social capital increases or decreases with increasing use of the internet, there has been less investigation into how different kinds of social capital might benefit with greater online or offline sociability (Williams, 2006). Wellman and Hampton (1999, 2002) argue increased communication online increases weak ties, which are important for accessing information and resources, linking groups and providing social identities. Other studies have found that bridging social capital is increased through the use of online social networks (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007; Bosancianu, Powell & Bratovic, 2013).

There is also evidence that activity in groups offline can be enhanced by online activity. A 2011 survey by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project found that the internet is now deeply embedded in group and organisational life in America. The survey found that 75% of all American adults are active in some kind of voluntary group or organisation, and internet users are more likely than others to be active: 80% of internet users participate in groups, compared with 56% of non-internet users. Social media users

are even more likely to be active: 82% of social network users and 85% of Twitter users are group participants (Rainie, Smith & Purcell, 2001).

The same study found that 46% of internet users who are active in groups say the internet has helped them be active in more groups than would otherwise be the case. 24% of those active in groups said they discovered at least some of their groups on the internet. While three times as many group members reported that they had found their groups offline, this study does demonstrate that online groups are a significant way of both joining people together and maintaining their relationships online and offline.

Haythornthwaite and Wellman (2002) argue that connectivity seems to go to the connected, and that greater social benefit from the internet accrues to those already well situated socially. They suggest social capital may be a prerequisite and not a consequence of interaction online. In this sense social capital offline is replicated online. Greater levels of social capital offline would therefore indicate higher levels of internet activity and a deeper engagement across online networks.

There is a further dimension to connectivity, which relates to the attitudes of internet users. In Genevieve Bell's 2009 study of South Australian connectedness, she uncovered two relationships to technology:

In one, technology is seen as vital; in the other it is burdensome. These two different ways of thinking about technology came up again and again and were not clearly related to age or gender or degree of technology awareness. (Bell, 2009, p. 19)

She also encountered a degree of self-deprecation when it came to technology among some users, "people who were sophisticated users of new technology but all of whom, when asked, described themselves as novices" (Bell, 2009, p. 23). She identified:

a perpetual sense of being slightly behind – this came up repeatedly in interviews, conversations and on SAstories.com. There was also a strong sense that being slightly behind also meant that you were losing out – you were not able to get connected or stay connected to essential services, community efforts or social relationships. (Bell, 2009, p24)

In 2009 report the European Computer Driving License Foundation, a certifying authority

which offers accreditation for digital literacy and computer skills programs, conducted a study of the levels of digital literacy, amongst more than 8000 people across Europe, Asia, Africa and South America countries and found a similar result (European Computer Driving License Foundation, *Digital Literacy Report*, 2009). The study measured not just actual ability but also an individual's self assessed perception to understand and use information and computer technology. It found that less than 1% of people identified themselves as digitally literate, while the study's authors ranked 63% of people as digitally literate when actually tested.

Both results reveal that many people feel anxious about their relationship to computer technology. Jenkins (2006) writes that the digital divide, framed in terms of basic access to technology, is giving way to a 'participation gap'. He writes that inclusion in participatory culture depends on:

extended access to those technologies, a greater familiarity with the new kinds of social interactions they enable, [and] a fuller mastery over the conceptual skills that consumers have developed in response to media convergence. (Jenkins, 2006, p. 23)

Haythornthwaite and Wellman (2002) contend that despite age, gender and location being the key areas for research into the digital divide, across all studies the most significant differences are related to years of experience. Those with the most experience - the 'netizens' - are the most active and accomplished users and engage in more kinds of activities.

While their analysis relates to research now conducted over a decade ago - a long time in the history of the internet - and they conceded that early adopters might not be the best predictors of ongoing behaviours, the online connectedness and confidence of internet users may have an impact on what they do online. Their research indicates that those best connected online might also be those best connected offline.

The question of whether online networks mirror the offline world, or are able to build and maintain different types of social capital is complex. As in real life, social networks formed on the internet may be strong or weak, long lasting or situational. While the internet brings us into contact with many strangers, it also supports strong ties of family, friends and other

connections. Our online connections might be with those far away, yet some scholars argue that despite the ability of the internet to link people at a distance, it also serves to complement local relationships. The extent to which online networks affect offline local relationships is taken up in the following section.

2.7 Locality

Internet neighbourliness is not completely replacing knocking on doors with fresh-baked brownies, or strolling down the street and waving to people on front porches. Instead, residents see the Web as another way to communicate within the community.

Rheingold 2006, p.55

Wellman and Hampton (1999) have suggested that while computer mediated relationships aren't dependent on geography, computer networks paradoxically encourage the formation and strengthening of local relationships. In their analysis, while the internet functions globally:

it functions lumpily: Even messages dispersed around the world are disproportionately exchanged within a few geographical areas, certain types of people or people in the same social networks. (Wellman & Hampton, 1999, p. 651)

So while interactions are not dependent on locality, they're also not disconnected from place - computer networks encourage the formation and strengthening of local relationships.

Matei and Ball-Rokeach's 2002 study of urban ethnic groups' use of the internet tested their hypothesis that the higher the level of belonging to local community, the higher the likelihood of making new personal bonds online. Their results showed that people's basic community orientation is equally strong online and offline. In other words, "belongers belong everywhere" (Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2002, p. 415).

They argue that the significance of geographic connection should come as no surprise, given previous studies of 'old media' which showed the localizing effect of telecommunications. They conclude that:

visions about, and value-orientations toward, online and offline spaces are, in fact, similar because they originate in people's minds, not in cyberspace itself...the strength of virtual ties can be expected to reflect those of real ones. (Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2002, p. 410)

Haythornthwaite and Wellman (2002) think about it another way. They conclude that computer mediated communication can foster 'globalisation', so that local as well as distant social contact is increased and existing communities are reinforced by the establishment of contact and support where none may have existed before.

This question of whether and how location might be a significant factor in both motivating ABC Open contributors and creating and maintaining networks has been an ongoing concern of my research. Location and the importance of geography emerged as a theme early in the development of ABC Open, and were highlighted in a presentation I gave at the TedxAdelaide conference in November, 2011 (Dwyer, 2011). In that talk I described the offline activities of ABC Open as being as important, if not more important, than what happens online, and argued that in a globalised world, the local continues to matter.

These comments might seem to sit at odds with commonly held ideas of the internet's capacity to connect people at a distance. But as the literature shows, local interactions can also be increased and maintained through online networks. These local factors are also interesting in relation to the ABC's goals of building national identity while also representing diversity – themes which are taken up in the following section.

2.8 Public service media, citizenry and national identity in the digital era

Public service broadcasters (PSBs) have emerged in a variety of forms across the globe yet have as their central values notions of "enlightenment, democracy, culture, service, choice and trust" (Hendy, 2013). For national public service broadcasters these values have been employed to help build an active citizenry (Murdock, 2005; Debrett, 2010; Hendy, 2013) and a sense of national identity (Burns, 2008; Hawkins, 2010).

The ABC developed in the Reithian tradition, named after the BBC's first director-general, Lord Reith, who sought to enlighten citizens and raise both the moral standards and public

taste of citizens, in short “intervening in their civic and moral training” (Jacka, 1997, p. 9). Reith believed that an engaged and enlightened citizenry could engage more fully in a democratic society (Hendy, 2013). These public service goals, including public interest and public good, are central to the ABC’s role. The ABC Charter describes this role as “broadcasting programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community” (Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act, 1983).

Managing Director Mark Scott asserts, “The ABC is not – nor can it be – detached from these fundamental democratic principles” (ABC, 2009) and the director of editorial policies, Paul Chadwick argues little has changed in the ABC’s mission since the 1949 policies pronounced:

The ABC service exists to serve no party, no section of the people. Its aim is to provide news and information of all the people, for all the people. Primarily, its aim is to serve, to provide the information that the people should have if they are to play their parts as intelligent citizens in the worthwhile life of the community. (ABC, 2012a)

Yet in recent years the purpose and legitimacy of public service broadcasters, including the ABC, have come increasingly under fire (Debrett, 2010; Murdock, 2005). The 1980s and 1990s saw dire predictions of the demise of PSBs internationally. Increased competition created through multi-channelling opened up global markets, the rise of neoliberalism fuelled debate over whether the time for government funding had passed, and cultural fragmentation further challenged the core purpose of PSBs to provide social cohesion (Jacka, 2003; Tambini and Cowling, 2004; Bennett, 2008; Debrett, 2010; Flew, 2011; Jakubowicz, 2010, Martin 2012). In the early 21st century, the pressure to downsize and limit the activities of public service broadcasters has not diminished (Lowe and Steemers, 2011).

Yet the digital era has also given rise to a different debate about the renewed social relevance of public service media. Debrett (2010) writes that the democratization of the tools of production has led to increasing interest in the ways new interactive and user-generated content can be developed to best serve public service goals (Debrett, 2010, pp.

23-24). In this context “the importance of independent media in reinvigorating public opinion as a force for social democracy and civic participation is acquiring new primacy” (Debrett, 2010, p.17-18).

A number of scholars have sought to re-imagine the public service remit for the digital era. Coleman (2002) argues for the creation of an online civic commons through public service media as an instrument for democratic participation. Murdock (2005) also argues for the creation of a digital commons, where citizens can access rights to cultural resources: information, knowledge, deliberation, representation and participation. Flew (2011) sees the challenge for public service media is “understanding the extent to which they can enhance their citizenship remit by opening up to the more participatory media cultures that social media is enabling, while still managing the potential risks that emerge as a result of a more open and fluid media environment” (Flew, 2011, p. 228). He suggests a rethinking of public service broadcasters as public service media (PSM) organizations which, he argues, should develop “a service-based and platform-neutral understanding of their mission and their role in the broader media ecology in relation to content diversity and media citizenship” (Flew, 2011, p. 223).

There is some evidence that public service media organizations are increasingly acknowledging the strategic importance of audience participation. Gunn Enli’s 2008 study of institutional documents from four national public service broadcasters (the BBC, the American PBS, Swedish SVT and Norwegian NRK) notes that these organizations now see participatory models as a key strategy for institutional legitimacy and platform expansion. While participatory formats have been primarily designed to attract audiences, they are also now employed strategically in an attempt to regain national importance and redefine the public service remit. These organizations, she writes, “seem to have found a powerful rhetorical tool in the coupling of the classic ideal of serving the public as active citizens, and prospects of a digital, convergent media environment” (Enli, 2008, p. 116). Martin (2012) also sees that online exchanges between users and broadcasters “have become potent symbols of public service broadcasting’s increased relevance, inclusiveness and accountability” (Martin, 2012, p. 178).

While strong on rhetoric, many scholars content that public service media organizations have not fully embraced the potential of participatory models. Jackson (2010) describes the

facilitation practices by producers within participatory public service environments as “nascent; crude and experimental” (Jackson, 2010, p. 176). She notes the reluctance of producers at the BBC when dealing with audience content as well as their use of public creativity to enhance their own programming rather than providing space for the public to create their own narratives (Jackson, 2010, p. 176).

Hawkins (2010) asserts that while there is no question that the new architectures of participation have allowed multiple voices to be heard in ways that were not previously possible, the ABC still sees this content as peripheral.

Martin’s (2012) study of three sites of audience interaction at the ABC reveals that ABC staff members have not always embraced audience interaction, with many regarding it as a potential threat to institutional credibility. Doubts about the audiences’ editorial and ethical capabilities have limited the capacity for dialogic interaction, and online discussion has more often represented “a tightly managed town hall debate rather than the familiar encounters of a town square” (Martin, 2012, p. 189).

More recently the case of ABC’s interactive television program *Q&A* “seems to offer complex and contradictory messages about political discourse” (Given & Radwyl, 2013, p. 17). Early concerns that the unruliness of the audience could undermine the trusted role of the ABC have to some extent subsided, yet the program is tightly controlled, “marrying brief fragments of online speech with the one-way, single channel authority of a television program broadcast live across a nation by a public service broadcaster” (Given & Radwyl, 2013, p. 2)

Kjus (2008) has also noted the risks to quality and editorial responsibility encountered through audience participation. In the digital era content producers face new dilemmas in gate-keeping, and are increasingly called upon to decide which forms of public interaction are in keeping with the public service remit and which are not:

To open up to public participation can stimulate civil action and public discussion, and thereby mark the public service institution as a progressive force in society. To hold back obviously risks these better possibilities, but nonetheless safeguards traditional remits and credibility or status. (Kjus, 2008, p. 146).

Yet to open up can also enliven the possibility of increasing populism. Lee-Wright (2008) argues this populism threatens the democratic pluralism at the heart of the public service model:

When BBC News allows its expertise to become subservient to populist perspectives, it inevitably favours the most popular, subsuming the potential for plurality to the majoritarian voice. True public service, like true democracy, enshrines the rights and interests of all views, not just the most vociferous. (Lee-Wright, 2008, p. 249-50)

Taking things even further, Lee-Wright cites James Curran's recommendation that representative pluralism should become a statutory aim of the British public service tradition and should be imposed by the parliament (Curran, 2003, p. 404).

For public service media, including the ABC, debates about how to represent both a national identity, to provide comprehensive, mainstream and national services, while at the same time encompassing the lived diversity of an increasingly pluralistic society, have been ongoing (Murdock, 2005; Hawkins, 2010).

Growing multicultural complexity resulting from large-scale immigration in Europe and beyond has, according to Kjus (2008) seen the role of the national PSB as the "national master of ceremonies" diminish, while "the need for common ground and integrative interaction has grown" (Kjus, 2008, pp. 141-142). Traditional broadcasting models have struggled to engage with the complexity of culturally diverse societies (Maclean, 2011), yet new interactive services have the potential to allow new voices to be heard and for there to be a more pluralistic representation of the nation (Burns, 2002; Martin & Wilson, 2002; Hawkins, 2010; Maclean, 2011; Flew, 2011).

Burns (2002) argues that while the ABC has long been a key source of critical history, pluralising and fracturing the concept of the nation, its online services have opened up new conversations about the role of the ABC as a public service broadcaster. Writing about early online services provided by the ABC, she asserts these services challenge the concept of national broadcaster in three ways: by removing the differentiation between national and

international audiences, by including services which are commercial (e.g. ABC Shop) or which are more akin to community media services (e.g. events diaries); and by challenging a sense of 'unified nation'.

Burns' analysis provides a useful perspective on the ABC's role in reflecting national identity. Burns draws on the work of political philosopher William Connolly to describe a model which allows for difference, rather than unity, to be fundamental. Connolly's concept of 'rhizomatic pluralism' cited by Burns, opens up the possibility of a decentred state:

Instead of promoting and supporting a liberal secular nation-state, where various constituencies argue over a centre, Connolly proposed an essentially decentred state, constantly in a process of pluralisation. With no centre to occupy, defend or desire, relations of power in such a state could be always in the process of becoming. (Burns, 2002, p. 64)

Hawkins (2010) writes that this shift away from representing a unified national public provides new opportunities for PSMs to function as sites where diverse constituencies and perspectives can be recognized and represented (Hawkins, 2010). She writes that "Australian cultural diversity is pervasive; there are multiple publics and interests, and national life, more than ever, involves a constant series of interactions between diverse constituencies" (Hawkins, 2010, p. 296).

Hawkins (2010) argues that new media technologies have enabled the ABC "to resist some of the homogenising tendencies of traditional PSB and develop niche services and audiences via new media platforms" (Hawkins, 2010, p. 288). Whether this amounts to a significant pluralisation of the mainstream is, she argues, yet to be seen.

Hawkins contrasts this pluralizing of the mainstream with attempts by the Special Broadcasting Service, SBS, to shake off its reputation as a niche narrowcasting service. SBS was established to cater to culturally diverse communities and to promote understanding of cultural diversity amongst all Australians (Hawkins, 2010, p289). Hawkins writes that in

2010, SBS's multiplatform services were still small and underdeveloped. Yet Maclean (2010) has identified SBS's online current affairs forums as an important site for the enablement of multicultural sociability, which she argues is "an important element of civic engagement and participation in multicultural societies" (Maclean, 2010, p. 1650). Her study of online forums following the television program, *Insight*, found evidence of significant recognition and exchange between divergent positions and perspectives, promoting if not consensus, then at least a greater understanding of the issues (Maclean, 2010, pp. 1664-5).

While these debates are often framed within concerns about cultural diversity, Martin & Wilson (2002) have also explored questions of locality, regional diversity and the potential for the internet to open up new spaces of identity. Their examination of the ABC online portal, *The Backyard*, identified the potential for web spaces "to operate as multiple spaces of identity, radically more diverse and unpredictable than radio" which "could complicate radio's more homogenous imaginings of regions, grounded in demographic categories of audience" (Martin & Wilson, 2002, p. 51).

However, if a more pluralised form of democracy is the aim, it stands to reason that the public broadcaster should not be the only source of this representative diversity. Jacka (2003) argues against the privilege of authoritative journalism and proposes a different approach:

If, however, we see democracy as pluralised, as marked by new kinds of communities of identity, as a system in which the traditional public-private divide does not apply, and as a system in which there are no universal visions of the 'common good' but, rather, pragmatic and negotiated exchanges about ethical behaviour and ethically inspired courses of action, then we will be able to countenance a plurality of communication media and modes in which such a diverse set of exchanges will occur. We will be open to the notion that ethical discourse can be present in many different kinds and genres of media texts and in many different forms of media organization. We will no longer privilege 'high modern journalism', but nor will we mindlessly workshop populist media. We will need a much more nuanced account of the connection between (various forms of) citizenship and the media. (Jacka, 2003, p. 183)

While digital and participatory media provide the potential for a much wider range of perspectives, genres and media texts, whether this amounts to a significant pluralisation of the ABC is still to be decided. Writing in 2010 before the impacts of ABC Open could be seen, Hawkins asserts that while there is no question that the new architectures of participation have allowed multiple voices to be heard in ways that were not previously possible, the ABC still sees this content as peripheral.

However, ABC Open's explicit strategy of seeking UGC to integrate into a wide range of programming represents a significant shift. While the ABC Open website operates as a host of all published content, the aim of distributing content as broadly as possible opens up new opportunities for fostering the engagement of citizens with the national broadcaster. The practices of ABC Open producers, discussed further in Chapter 4, aid the development of more nuanced relationships between citizens and the national broadcaster and allow a more pluralistic representation of the Australian experience.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I outline the methodological approach used to explore the motivations of ABC Open contributors in participatory media production and the outcomes of their participation. My research question is:

What are the motivations for and outcomes of participatory media production in the context of the national public service broadcaster in a time of digital transformation?

The focus of my research is ABC Open, and using a case study approach I have collected the empirical data through qualitative methods, specifically participant observation and in-depth interviews with a selection of contributors to the ABC Open website.

The field of communication research is “a sprawling and multidisciplinary field of research approaches and theories” (Hansen & Machin, 2013, p. 1). As such it encompasses a number of methodologies underpinned by a broad range of theoretical perspectives, including (but not limited to) sociology, psychology, anthropology, linguistics and political economy (Gunter, 2000; Hansen and Machin, 2013; Holmes 2005). Yet Hansen and Machin (2013) describe the cross-disciplinary nature of communication research as a strength, allowing for an adaptive approach which takes into account the rapid changes in both media technology and the political, cultural and social context in which this development occurs.

As I am both a practising media professional and a media studies researcher, this project requires an approach where both the dynamics of media production and an analysis of the social, political and institutional environment in which this production takes place can be captured. In short, the account needs to encompass not only the creation of ABC Open and its implementation, but to examine this in the context of national public service broadcasting, rapidly developing technological change and the framework of the creation of new national communication infrastructure. Added to this context this thesis also needs to encompass the effect of the emergence of new methods of citizen driven media production, and the way in which citizens in regional Australia have experienced the act of production and online publication and the results of their involvement in ABC Open.

Therefore this research project employs a mixed methodological approach to capture different types of data, with the aim of synthesising the findings into a coherent narrative.

To this end, given the framework and size limitations of a Masters thesis, the methods chosen offer the richest data sources to explore the key theoretical question, namely the interaction of online activity with offline community development in Australia outside of the major cities.

The methodological approach I have chosen uses qualitative research methods in order to understand the complexity of contributor motivations within this framework. Qualitative research employs a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices to understand the subject matter at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative methods have provided me with a framework to describe the particularity of the ABC Open project, and the nuances of each participants' experience within that. It also allows an iterative process, which has been critical as the research has been undertaken during a time when ABC Open itself has been rapidly evolving.

Importantly, qualitative research locates the observer in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). An important element in this research project is my role as researcher. As both project director of ABC Open and academic researcher I occupy a dual role which has required a highly reflexive approach. If the field of qualitative research is defined "primarily by a series of essential tensions, contradictions and hesitations", (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. xi) then this research project is a case in point. The following description of my approach provides an outline of the tensions and hesitations I experienced, and a context for the rest of this chapter.

3.2 The role of the researcher

When this project commenced I was one of two project directors (i.e. co-director) of ABC Open, and now at the completion of this project I am the sole project director. I have editorial responsibility for the ABC Open website and for ABC Open producer activities, and responsibility for setting and directing the implementation of the strategy to grow a contributor base and audience for the content created. I was the first person specifically employed on the project and have been a key driver of its evolution since before its official launch in 2010 until the present time. As such, I have been required to critically examine my subjective position at all stages of this research project.

It was initially very difficult to see how I could disentangle myself sufficiently to enable a critical understanding of the research subject. At first I was drawn to action research as a way to bring together the professional and research aims. Action research is a form of inquiry where professionals and researchers work together in a highly collaborative process to find solutions to relevant problems (Greenwood & Levin, 2005). This seemed like a good approach, as questions of motivation and the conditions for participation were areas of interest for both ABC Open and for me as researcher.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) describe participatory action research as a participatory, practical and reflexive practice. As I was straddling two roles, that of researcher and stakeholder, I was interested in finding a way through the complexity of both projects – the professional project of developing new forms of interaction between the ABC and the Australian community, and the research project of bringing together multiple theoretical standpoints into something that was relevant and coherent.

However, action research is not just a matter of attempting to solve a problem. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) describe action research as an essentially transformative process “realized by groups of people who join together in changing the practices through which they interact in a shared social world” (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005, p. 563), and which seeks to “transform the practices they are producing and reproducing through their current ways of working” (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005, p. 565).

While action research had much to offer, this focus on transformation did not seem like such a good fit. As ABC Open was only newly formed, the practices of key professional stakeholders, their relationships and even the context of their work were not yet clear. However, what was clear was that my colleagues felt being involved in a research project might place an extra layer of complexity on an already fairly complex endeavour, and extra, unwarranted pressure on themselves in a professional context. In its initial launch phase, ABC Open was under a great deal of scrutiny, and there was little appetite for further scrutiny – people just wanted to get on with the job. It was likely that the effect of a participatory action research at that time could have been that my colleagues would have felt constrained, both in terms of the research and their own professional work. So while I felt there could be merit in that approach, it was apparent that the only ethical course of action was to make sure that others in the team could operate without concerning

themselves with any particular research paradigm, and could act as free agents to develop ABC Open without the added time and resource pressure of engaging in a research project.

A more appropriate approach emerged in the form of case study (Lincoln and Guba, 1980; Stake, 1998; Hammersley and Gomm, 2000; Yin, 2009). The use of case study allows for a detailed investigation of both the actions of participants and the real life context of their participation and will be discussed further in Section 3.3. This method has allowed me to observe the development of ABC Open as a whole, as well as exploring the motivations of the research participants. It also allows for an iterative process, which I felt was essential during this period of rapid transformation for ABC Open.

As I am both professional practitioner and researcher it has been critical that I develop a reflexive approach. Smyth and Shacklock (1998) describe the process of reflexivity as an attempt to:

identify, do something about and acknowledge the limitations of the research: its location, its subjects, its process, its theoretical context, its data, its analysis, and how accounts recognize that the construction of knowledge takes places in the world and not apart from it. (Smyth and Shacklock, 1998, p.7)

Donald Schon (1991), one of the more influential scholars of reflexive practice, also writes about the importance of understanding the context of the object of study. Writing about professional practice, he refers to the history of 'technical rationality', which, he says, sees professional practice as a process of problem solving. But he argues that this emphasis on problem solving ignores the setting (Schon, 1991, p. 40). A reflexive approach shifts the emphasis to the context, not just the problem the professional seeks to solve.

Understanding the setting of ABC Open and my place in that setting is important to this research. There is no getting away from the fact that I bring my own subjective viewpoint to the research project. For most of the last twenty years, I have been employed by the ABC, primarily as a radio producer, and more recently as project director of ABC Open. In a positive sense, this institutional knowledge and long personal history with the organization gives me a solid (albeit subjective) understanding of the nuances of the ABC as an institution. However, I am also aware that I am deeply embedded in the culture and

practices of the Radio Division of the ABC in which ABC Open operates. The role of Project Director has been a step up for me professionally from my previous role as radio producer, and so my professional reputation and identity are deeply imbedded in the success of ABC Open. As well as this I have a strong personal desire to develop a viable model for ABC Open, and to help create new production models for the benefit of the ABC and the community.

My research process has included writing notes of conversations with producers, editors and the ABC Open editorial team, which I have collected in a private blog. Through this blog I have also recorded my own thoughts and reactions, and the evolution of my role as researcher. This blog is now a memory aid and a record of this exploratory phase and the process by which I have worked through key areas of tension.

Two areas of tension stand out. The first relates to my assumptions. During the early observation phase of the research, the emergence of the importance of geographic location surprised me. After all, the internet is often discussed in terms of its ability to dissolve distance. So I was initially sceptical about whether ABC Open should focus more on the location of contributors. However, on reflection, I realised that this focus might in fact stem from the organisation of ABC Open itself. ABC Open producers are responsible for geographic regions, and the website has the concept of region as a top level navigation tool. The organisation of ABC Local Radio, which houses the ABC Open producers in its offices, has a deep and historical emphasis on geographic location. The question of whether the focus on location was primarily driven by ABC Open contributors or by the ABC Open structure was a question I constantly re-examined during the research process.

A second area of tension concerned the shaping of the research question for this thesis. In shaping the question I was influenced by a desire to explore an area of inquiry that could be useful to both ABC Open and to myself in my role as project director and which would add to the body of research knowledge about participatory media. However, my blog also reveals that I felt the need to find an area of inquiry that but would not compromise me in either of my two roles. I was able to develop parameters to work within by being constantly aware of my subjective position, assessing any potential for a conflict of interest, so that my final research question could be explored without me feeling constrained in either role.

A challenge for this research project is the fact that many of the conversations which took place during the research period have been of a private, sometimes confidential, nature. The balance between professional ethics and research intentions is one that I've been acutely aware of. While I have drawn on my own knowledge to explore which research questions to ask, I have also interviewed former co-director Ann Chesterman, a close former colleague, who has had (until April 2013 when she left her position with ABC Open) the same level of intimate knowledge of ABC Open as me yet has the critical distance to determine which areas of knowledge are appropriate for publication. Aside from this interview, I have only quoted publicly available material relating to ABC Open, including my own public statements, to ensure that professional and ethical lines are not crossed.

As the research has progressed, knowledge gained through the field work has also informed my decision making in a professional context. This knowledge has at times called for me to question assumptions made within the ABC Open team. At the same time I have felt to some degree compromised by not being able to fully share my field data with colleagues. This has required me to carefully consider the boundaries between my professional responsibilities and my obligations to respect the anonymity of the research participants.

Further constraints emerged when the ABC Open design and development team conducted its own user testing, approaching producers to suggest contributors who might be interested in participating in a research project. During this time, I felt producers would feel undue pressure should I continue to recruit participants. The result is that the field interviews were drawn from a smaller pool of participants than originally intended (see below).

And finally, during the field work phase of the project I was also aware of my role as project director in relation to the research participants. The interviews reveal that some of the research participants at times blurred these lines. During several of the interviews, participants talked about the positive experience of working with a particular producer, letting me know (as the head of ABC Open) that the producer they had worked with had done a good job. These sections of the in-depth interviews have not been used in the following chapters.

3.3 Case Study approach

Robert K. Yin (2009), a leading author in the use of case study writes:

you would want to use the case study method because you wanted to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth, but such understanding encompassed important contextual conditions, because they were highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study. (Yin, 2009, p. 639/4690).

The subject of my study is a contemporary phenomenon, which is highly influenced by its context: that is, both the rapidly changing media environment (which includes impact of technology and the development of participatory media) *and* the context of the public service media. Case studies provide a way of looking at a phenomenon in context, and examining the complexity of a particular phenomenon in its natural setting.

One of the key proponents of case-study research is the educational psychologist Robert E. Stake (1998) who has argued that case study is not so much a choice of methodology, but of the object to be studied. He identified three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. The first, the intrinsic case study, does not try to represent other cases, but is undertaken because “in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of interest” (Stake, 1998, p. 88).

Yin (2009) provides a further rationale. He describes one form of case study as revelatory, used because a “situation exists when an investigator has an opportunity to observe and analyse a phenomenon previously inaccessible to social science enquiry” and “because the descriptive information alone will be revelatory” (1221-3/4690).

These rationales for the use of case study methodology resonated with my research intentions. ABC Open sits at the intersection of a number of different issues, including the practices of participatory media, the crisis in traditional and public service media, digital literacy and training of citizens, and questions of national identity and the ‘national conversation’. While these themes have been widely canvassed in the research literature, ABC Open is unique in that it sits at the intersection of them all.

Therefore, the use of case study, in which the researcher “orient[s] to complexities connecting ordinary practice in natural habitats to the abstractions and concerns of diverse

academic disciplines” (Stake, 1998, p 92), seemed highly appropriate.

ABC Open provides a specific and bounded case that reveals how the personal and the social intersect through locality and technology. This question of boundedness is important. Both Stake (1978) and Lincoln and Guba (2000) argue that to do the job well, the case study researcher must make sure that the case is bounded and specific. ABC Open is such a case.

Stake (1978) and Lincoln and Guba (2000) also assert that the case must allow the researcher to provide “thick descriptions” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 40). My immersion in ABC Open over a four-year period has provided me with a deep knowledge of its specific conditions, processes and concerns. As Project Director of ABC Open I am in a unique position to study this case and to provide such thick descriptions.

The benefits and pitfalls of the case study approach have been vigorously debated, particularly in relation to the fields of education and social work. One of the key concerns of critics of the case study approach is the problem of a lack of generalization (Lincoln and Guba, 2000: Hammersley and Gomm, 2000). The divide between qualitative and quantitative research methods - between the scientific positivist and the naturalistic post-positivist approach - has been ongoing over many decades. Critics of the case study ask what value there can be in studying the particular, when the aim of science is to form generalisations that can be universally applied.

However, Schofield (2000) argues that this is not the point of qualitative research. She writes that while many scientists are concerned with the replicability of their research, the qualitative researcher has a different aim:

The goal is *not* to produce a standardized set of results that any other careful researcher in the same situation of studying the same issue would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation. (Schofield, 2000, p.71)

While acknowledging these debates exist, after examining a range of research methods, the case-study approach emerged as the most appropriate to my area of inquiry. ABC Open is a complex phenomenon. The use of case study as a methodology allows for a detailed investigation of both the actions of participants and the context of ABC Open as a whole. The case-study methodology I have used for this research project incorporates participant

observation, an examination of published accounts of ABC Open (including promotional material, documents, speeches and the content itself) and in-depth interview. This method has allowed for a study of the particular, as well as the general: for thick descriptions of the specific experiences of participants, while also allowing for common themes to emerge.

This approach also allows room for unpredictable results that may alter the research framework. As this project has been undertaken in the context of a rapidly changing environment and in an emerging area of knowledge it is appropriate to be adaptive to the research results as they unfold. As described below, the research question was developed through a process of iteration that coincided with changes in the direction of ABC Open itself. The ability to respond to these changes and to shape the research accordingly has been highly valuable.

3.4 Data collection and analysis

The key data collection methods have been participant observation, in-depth interviews and an examination of published material.

Participant observation

Participant observation is a form of ethnographic inquiry which allows the researcher to draw on a wide range of information to shed light on the issues with which he or she is concerned (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). As an ethnographic method, participant observation has often been used to study social groups, through a process whereby “an investigator establishes and sustains a many-sided and relatively long-term relationship with a human association in its natural setting for the purpose of developing a scientific understanding” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p.18). The aim is to collect the richest possible data through an intimate familiarity with the setting achieved by face-to-face contact with, and prolonged immersion in, a social location or circumstance.

Participant observation assisted me to develop a highly nuanced understanding of ABC Open, to provide a context for developing the scope of the research, the choice of research participants and the parameters for the in-depth interviews I describe later in this chapter.

The observation process began in early 2010 at the start of this research project and was initially exploratory. By listening, taking notes, recording them in a private blog and analysing these notes I was able to develop a sense of the range issues facing ABC Open. The key sites of observation were the office of ABC Open in Sydney and the regular weekly conference calls between ABC Open producers with their editors and the Sydney management team. Producers are the primary vehicle for feedback to ABC Open management about the process of community engagement and the practices of contributors. That is, the management team rarely has direct contact or interaction with the contributors, and relies on producers to report back about the successes and challenges of their work in the field. Added to this were conversations with my then co-director in the Sydney office.

Initially this process was open-ended, and a large amount of data was collected which reflected the many and varied issues raised by producers and discussed at the ABC Open Sydney offices. Over a period of many months, several strong themes began to emerge, including those which became the eventual focus of this research project, that is, the relationship of locality, motivation and outcome in the context of the national broadcaster.

Although I chose participant observation to conduct my research I am conscious of the criticisms of this approach. In a survey of participant observation, Kawulich (2005) describes several of these criticisms including the claim that it is subjective, even biased, and that the presence of the researcher may alter the setting of the research – in effect that it might change the results.

These dangers were present in this research project and, as described above, I was highly aware of my role as both professional and researcher. In thinking about these dual roles I have understood my stance as closest to the “participant as observer” stance (Gold, 1958), that is, I was always an active member of the group. Yet even this stance is not entirely descriptive of my situation – I was participant *and* observer, actively engaged in both to differing degrees throughout the entire research process.

Kawulich (2005) cites Merriam (1998) who has countered the question about whether researchers should be concerned about their presence affecting the situation. Kawulich suggests that “the question is not whether the process of observing affects the situation or

the participants, but how the researcher accounts for those effects in explaining the data” (Kawulich, 2005).

This is what I have attempted to do. By adopting a high level of reflexivity I have constantly questioned my assumptions and my influence. I have tested my assumptions through many conversations with colleagues and through the in-depth interviews.

Published material

There is a large data set of documents, including promotional material, the ABC Open website and the published content it contains, and several speeches by the ABC managing director (and one by myself) which have been published online.

These documents have provided significant context to the research project. The ABC Open website has had several iterations which mark the shifting dynamics of the project over time. By observing these iterations I have been able to view the public face of ABC Open from a critical standpoint and the way in which ABC Open projects its intentions to its audience.

A review of individual pieces of content published by the research participants was used to both provide a context for the individual interviews. While I was able to ask questions about individual contributions, for confidentiality reasons I have not referred to these specifically in this thesis. By examining the dates of all contributions by these participants on the ABC Open site I was able to observe patterns of contribution and see if participants’ expectations of their future behaviour at the time of interview had come to pass. Participants were asked if they intended to continue contributing, and over a period of months I was able to observe if they had continued to publish content and if so, what the pattern of their contribution post-interview had been.

In-depth interviews

A primary research method was semi-structured in-depth interview. I conducted nine interviews (eight with ABC Open contributors and another with former co-director, An Chesterman) over the period from February 2013 until November 2013. The eight

contributors were drawn from seven geographic locations (i.e. two participants came from the same town). Interview questions were framed around key areas of investigation, including the motivation to become involved and the effects of that participation, both in terms of content created and the social and other effects of participation, locally and online. Other questions were asked to establish participants' pre-existing skills and levels of social capital.

In undertaking this project my intention is not to be representative but to be both descriptive and explanatory. My aim is to understand the ways in which various factors influence a person's capacity and motivation to participate, and the results of their participation, both for themselves and more broadly. While the research may pull together common themes, not all individual cases pick up on all of these themes.

Understanding the life experiences of participants may also be critical to understanding the research results. The participants have a broad range of past experiences and current life circumstances, and their engagement with ABC Open varies significantly. Participants were drawn from 'Regional Australia', a concept which is broad and generally ill-defined. While often described as a place in itself, regional Australia is really a catch-all for a wide variety of economic and cultural zones that have one thing in common – they are not within Australian capital cities.

The concept of digital literacy is also not well defined. Digital literacy can include the ability to operate a computer, but is increasingly also seen in terms of a person's capacity to use computer-mediated technology to achieve their own personal goals as well as to operate effectively in society. As discussed further in Chapter 4, participants had highly subjective conceptions of their own capacity to effectively use computer and media technology, and these are better captured using qualitative methods.

The differences between the participants mean that the particularity of each participant's environment and experience is crucial in terms of understanding the fundamental questions of motivation and outcome. In-depth interviews are the best way to capture the information necessary to understand the motivations of these participants and the outcomes of participation for each individual.

A further in-depth interview with the former ABC Open co-director, Ann Chesterman, provided valuable data against which I was able to test my own subjective experience. From Jan 2010 until April 2013, Chesterman and I shared the role of ABC Open project director. As such, Chesterman has a highly detailed knowledge of ABC Open, the philosophical underpinning of the project, its evolution and the decisions that have shaped its development. While my own experience provides me with a similar depth of detailed knowledge, I felt it was important to test my recollections and assumptions against the experience of Chesterman.

Approval from the UTS Human Research Ethics committee was sought and granted for the in-depth interviews. Particular attention was given to my pre-existing relationship with the ABC Open producers, who, as mentioned above, were asked to suggest potential candidates, and any possible implications with regard to my professional role. This was mitigated by approaching a range of producers with the clear message that many producers had been asked, thus there would be no consequence if any producer did not want to be involved. Attention was also given to the likely effects on participants, and a slight risk that participants might feel uncomfortable discussing their motivations was noted. However, as participants had already placed their work in the public domain, and as recognition is widely acknowledged in the literature as a motivating factor in participating in online networks, I assessed this risk as very low.

The ABC as an institution was not formally engaged in this project, however, I advised my supervisors and colleagues of the subject and scope of my research and methods, and have been supported by them throughout the process.

To ensure the confidentiality of participants, I have changed their initials and removed references to specific content to minimize the risk of them being recognized.

Data analysis

As outlined above, the qualitative case study approach I am using seeks to provide rich descriptions in order to better understand the particularity of the case in question. When citizens engage as contributors to ABC they enter into a series of relationships – with their local producer, the ABC as an institution, with other contributors and with the

technology - and also the dynamics of engaging in this field. This points to a number of dimensions that can be examined when seeking to understand people's motivations to participate and the effect of their participation. These include; the organisational dimension – what does the organisation ask of them; the personal dimension – what brings them to participate; and the public dimension – what happens as a result of their publishing their work.

To understand these relationships I have used a number of different methods. By immersing myself in the institutional practices of the ABC I have been able to gather information about the aims of ABC Open and how these are pursued through ABC Open's activities. Public documents have provided valuable data about the public face of ABC Open, but the primary process was participant observation, which enabled me to draw together the main themes of location, motivation and outcome. These themes were explored through in-depth interviews.

The analysis of this data involved a process of triangulation, using a variety of data sources, theoretical perspectives, and methodological approaches (Janesick, 1998), and viewing the data from multiple reference points (Jick, 1979).

I used thematic analysis as a method of analysing the interview data. Aronson (1994) describes thematic analysis as a method of analysing data which focuses on patterns of experience (Aronson, 1994). Interview data is transcribed and themes are identified. The second step according to Aronson is to identify all data that relate to the already classified patterns. Patterns are then combined and catalogued into sub themes, which can then be used to form a picture of the participants' collective experience. I followed this process. I transcribed the interviews and identified themes and sub-themes. I sought to not only pull together the themes that were obvious from the structure of interview questions, but to look for emerging and unexpected patterns. Themes were also identified through participant observation and published materials. These themes and sub-themes are explored in Chapters 4 to 6.

3.5 Research participants

The study of ABC Open contributors consisted of eight participants, that is, people who had contributed to an ABC Open project or activity by producing a digital image, video or blog post that has been published on the ABC Open site.

ABC Open contributors are drawn from a large geographical area (regional Australia) and may be young or old, skilled or unskilled, from any background or gender. Contributors may have contributed once, or hundreds of times. They may have chosen to contribute after coming across the website, or might have been encouraged to attend a workshop through a group they were already associated with. They might have published to other websites, or be highly active on social media, or may have never published media content before, and have no social media accounts.

In looking at criteria for selecting participants, I was not looking to be representative but to ensure a spread across a number of criteria. There are many variants that were explored before the final parameters were reached. These included location, age, gender, ethnicity, pre-existing digital skills, frequency of contribution to ABC Open, level of mediation (i.e. how did participants interact with their local producer), local producer, and the type of content produced.

The ABC Open website, at the time of writing, lists 8100 people on the site (ABC Open, 2014a), with over 57,800 individual contributions (ABC Open, 2014b). In 2012-13, ABC Open producers delivered 2515 multimedia training workshops and mentoring sessions to 12,100 people aged between 15 and 80 years of age (ABC, 2013).

However, in a research project of this size, not all of the criteria could be considered, so I had to decide which criteria seemed most relevant for this study. The question of ethnicity was one I grappled with early in the research design. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that those born outside of Australia are mostly city dwellers – 18% of this group live outside urban areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). In the regions covered by the producers who agreed to be part of the study this figure held largely true. However, I felt that the huge diversity of cultural and ethnic backgrounds found in regional Australian meant that to choose participants along the basis of cultural background could be problematic. In short, to include ethnicity in any meaningful way would have required a

larger sample.

Ultimately, after experimenting with a range of filters, the key parameters decided upon for choosing participants as outlined below were location, age and gender. These parameters were chosen to allow an investigation of the impact of access to technology, digital literacy, and social capital on the act of participation.

Selection of participants was conducted through the producers. I made a decision early in the process to only ask those producers who I felt were confident enough in their work and their relationship with me as project director to say no should they wish to. Some did indeed opt out, however, most were interested in assisting and were able to identify contributors who were interested in being involved in the study.

The contributors suggested were personally known to the producers (some contributors upload directly and have no contact with producers) and were generally those who had been identified as either regular contributors, or those who had contributed once or twice and seemed enthusiastic and likely to continue. In all cases the contributors were those with whom the producers felt comfortable.

On a further note regarding ethnicity, all of the participants suggested by producers were Anglo-Australians. There are many possible reasons for this. The majority culture of many regional towns is Anglo-Celtic. The producers themselves may have found it easier to ask Anglo contributors (most producers are Anglo-Australian, although one who assisted with this research project is not). The ethnicity and cultural background of ABC Open contributors and the motivations of and outcomes for a more culturally diverse group of contributors would make for interesting future research.

The original sample size of the case studies was set at sixteen participants, to allow for a sample across gender, age and location. However, during the participant recruitment phase, the ABC Open website development team also embarked upon its own research project to understand the motivations of contributors. This research is intended to inform future development of the ABC Open site. The researchers in that team approached producers and asked them to recommend research participants.

This produced a dilemma for me as a researcher. While I was concerned about the size of

my sample, I also felt that any attempt to continue to recruit participants would be unethical, as 'claiming' certain participants could limit the ability of the ABC Open research team to do its work. I felt this as a clear conflict of interest, and decided that the only ethical course of action was to cease further recruitment of participants and to continue this research with a smaller sample of eight.

While the sample size may be relatively small, it is information rich. The ABC Open contributors chosen for this research project are the experts in their own participation, and have provided detailed information on their experiences. The aim of this case study is not to compare and draw conclusions, but to provide a rich and detailed description of the phenomenon itself. While there is some commonality of experience, not all participants noted all of the themes, yet the field work did reveal some unexpected findings.

For example, the increase in local connections and the extension of social capital following their engagement with ABC Open emerged as a relatively strong finding in several of the interviews. For some participants the context of the ABC was critical to their engagement. As well as this some of my assumptions proved to be less relevant than initially envisaged. The filter of age was ultimately less significant than originally thought as the data showed no relationship between age and computer use or interest, and low levels of day-to-day computer activity did not present a barrier to participation once motivation was present.

Location

Location was chosen as a key parameter because of the wide variation in Australian regional communities in terms of population, distance to essential services and internet connectivity. While ABC Open is intended to attract regional Australians, the concept of regional Australia itself is not firmly fixed e.g. in some definitions Darwin is considered regional, even though it also qualifies as a capital city, while Newcastle is not considered regional. Regional might therefore be defined as much by social constructs as it is by geography or economic conditions.

Regional Australia includes cities and villages, locations which have or have had an agricultural base, or not, and also areas with a strong industrial background. Services are generally less available than in capital cities, but to widely varying degrees. The experience

of living in the Illawarra may be markedly different to the experience of living in the Kimberley or in Gippsland.

Locations chosen for this research project were primarily towns with small (<5000) or large (>20,000) populations. There were two exceptions to this. One participant lives on an isolated station some distance from a small remote town, while at the other end of the scale one participant lives in a regional city.

The locations chosen also demonstrated a range of degrees of accessibility using the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ABS, 2011). This standard is used to provide a framework for understanding and interpreting the geographical of statistics published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and is also used in assessing the remoteness of regions for the Australian Government's Department of Health. I used this classification system, as well as size of population, to ensure a spread of location types. As the recruitment of participants was halted due to the research project of the ABC Open design and development team, I did not cover all region types. However given the sample size I have covered a range of regions. For detailed description of participant location see Appendix B.

The Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) classifies regions as:

- RA5 - Very Remote
- RA4 - Remote
- RA3 - Outer Regional
- RA2 - Inner Regional
- RA1 - Major City.

Gender

There are 4 male participants and 4 female participants. While internet access may present a significant barrier to participation for women in developing countries (Intel, 2012), recent research demonstrates that in the US the gender gap has significantly closed (Fallows, 2005), and that women in the 'western world' might in fact use the internet more than men (Intel 2012; Australian Policy Online, 2013). However there is evidence to show that women and men use the internet differently, that women are greater users of social media (Brenner, 2013; Duggan, 2013; Sensis, 2013), and that women are more likely to use the internet to develop and nurture relationships while men are more involved in pursuing

personal interests and finding information (Fallows, 2005). Therefore, gender is an important filter through which to explore questions of connectivity and community.

A gendered analysis of social capital also reveals differences in the type and level of engagement of women and men in associational activity (Gidengil & O'Neill, 2006). These patterns may be described both structurally and culturally, and may relate to personal agency or the role of mobilizing networks in developing individual social capital (Norris & Inglehart, 2006). Gender is therefore also relevant to questions about whether and how pre-existing social capital might be transformed into "democratic assets" (Gidengil and O'Neill, 2006, p. 6), in this case, through the use of participatory media.

Age

A third determinant was the age of each participant. I divided participants into two groups, those under 40, who might be thought of as 'digital natives', and those over 40, who might be thought of as 'digital immigrants'. These terms were popularised by Prensky (2001) who argued that those who have been brought up with computers think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors. Digital natives are native speakers of the languages of video games and the internet, while digital immigrants have had to learn to adapt to the new languages and practices they have been taught. In Australia, the IBM PC was released in 1983 and computers were introduced into schools by 1990. This might suggest that those who left school before 1990 (and who would therefore be over 40 in 2013) could be considered digital immigrants, while those younger than this could be considered digital natives. This distinction between digital natives and immigrants was aptly summed up by TG, a male under 40 who, when asked about his use of email replied, "Oh you're Generation X aren't you?....because nobody uses email. You use Facebook." For this research project, then, I selected 4 participants who were over 40 and 4 participants who were under 40.

Prensky's argument has been extensively critiqued as outlined by Bennett's 2012 survey of a number of studies investigating the concept of digital natives. In that survey, he outlines a number of studies that have found that, while age has some bearing, diversity is often higher within age groups than between them (Bennett, 2012). However, my colleagues and I had often assumed that age is relevant to participation, and that those in younger

demographics were more able and willing to participate. As a result I decided to explore this proposition and to include age as a factor.

Participants

MB (Female, under 40, population <5000, RA5) was brought up on a property outside of the remote town of F, and still lives in the region. While the town is a major service centre, it has a small population of approximately 1,500. MB now lives on a property and works on the farm as well as home schooling her children. She has strong friends locally as well as extended networks developed through her time at boarding school. When asked how connected she feels to her local community, she responded “Very, very connected”. Although she home schools her children she is involved in a range of networks and is both an active volunteer and organizer.

TG (Male, under 40, population <5000, RA5) lives in the very remote town of A. He grew up in a larger regional centre, and has moved to the town for work. He works as a teacher, is a pastor and board member of his local church and is active in his community, although mostly in a church context. He’s well known locally, although “there are times when I’ve had really bad rapport with the community, and felt like nobody understood or appreciated me at all.”

OS (Female, under 40, population >20,000, RA3) is a mother of small children and an artist. She writes a journal and enjoys writing for pleasure, but had not previously published online. OS has moved around a lot and has lived in her current location for around 6 years. She has a very poor internet connection. The town she lives in has a population of around 33,000.

HS (Male, under 40, population <5000, RA3) was brought up in the region he now lives in. Although he studied away from the region and has travelled extensively overseas, he’s returned to his family home. He’s been actively involved in local cultural events – he’s an organizer for a local film festival and has volunteered at a local cultural festival, as well as playing in the local cricket team.

DC (Female, over 40, population >20,000, RA2) has not always lived locally and has strong ties outside of her local community. She has local friendship groups and is very involved in local cultural groups. She has been a music teacher and has studied at the local university; she is active in her local church, she's a friend of the local art gallery and is part of a casual lunch group of professional women.

FG (Male, over 40, population <5000, RA5) is a local business owner in the remote town of A and is well known in his local community, so much so that "When I walk down the main street I'll stop and have a chat four or five times in a block." This prominence can sometimes be a hindrance, so he tends not to have close friends in town.

BG (Female, over 40, population <5000, RA2) is a former community artist and is active in her community. She currently works part time in her local library, and describes herself as being very connected to her local community. She is involved in a range of local cultural group, and often tries to rope people in to new experiences. She has been actively trying to recruit contributors to ABC Open in her town.

OT (Male, over 40, population >20,000, RA1) had lived locally all this life and most of his friends and family also live locally. He is not particularly active in his community, although he is a member of the local historical society.

CHAPTER 4 IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore some of research findings in terms of the impact of technology on the research participants. The vast majority of Australians now use the internet routinely for all kinds of daily activities. Some aspects of internet use simply relate to finding more convenient ways to do things we have always done, like shopping or banking, while others have deeper effects. In 2012, the information and measurement company Nielsen reported that the use of social media is now mainstream in Australia, with close to half of all online Australians browsing social networking sites on a weekly basis (Gillmer, 2012). This use of the internet is changing the frequency and nature of interaction with friends, and also leading to new ways of thinking about digital literacy and participation in digital culture (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009).

While the internet is now an integral part of the everyday life of many Australians, the data collected through the in-depth interviews shows a varying level of experience and ease with computers amongst research participants. These findings are supported by the data collected through observation of producer conversations, with ABC Open producers reporting skill levels amongst contributors ranging from high levels of technical skill to a very basic or even limited understanding of the internet.

This chapter outlines the pre-existing skills of participants, the barriers to involvement and the effects of these factors on the ability of these ABC Open contributors to participate. The data shows that new practices and forms of social behaviour don't necessarily come as a direct result of technological skill or connectivity.

4.2 Computer skills and digital literacy

ABC Open attempts to capitalize on the growing trend of participatory media production and to further encourage this trend by providing skills training to community members to assist them to participate. While face-to-face skills training is important, one aim of ABC Open is to develop the skill levels of participants to a point where they can contribute by

themselves and develop their own habits of participation (Chesterman, interview, Nov. 13 2013).

The interview data demonstrates that participants barely distinguished between computer and online skills. Computer skills were primarily seen in terms of the ability to function online, including the ability to find the information they need. Several participants also rated their skills in terms of their ability to use specific software (e.g. the editing program Final Cut Pro).

Wellman (2002) argues that length and frequency of use are significant factors in terms of the ways people use technology. A more highly engaged user, then, might be a person who uses computers and the internet frequently and has done so for some time. However, despite their engagement with ABC Open, participants in this research project did not necessarily indicate a frequent use of computers. In fact, the data showed that research participants came to ABC Open with a wide range of experience with computers, and there was no consistent pattern of online experience across age or gender.

Although my numbers are small, my research supported Bennett's (2002) finding that age is not as significant as other factors when determining digital literacy and participation. The data indicated that age is not as important as attitude and a propensity to engage with new technologies. An emerging theme throughout the data collection was the attitude of participants who had not grown up with computers, but had nonetheless embraced them. One participant who had left school in the mid 1970s described an early interest in computers, while another spoke of the role her early adopter father had played in introducing computers to the household. While those participants aged over 40 all considered themselves to be digital immigrants, 3 out of 4 indicated a strong and persistent desire to be competent with emerging technologies.

The youngest participant, HS, was one of the least active users of the internet for the purpose of connecting with others. He generally preferred to use the telephone to connect with people locally and used email primarily to contact people overseas. He was not yet on Facebook and had only recently purchased a mobile phone.

Similarly, one of the oldest participants, OT, did not spend a lot of time online. He only checked his email sporadically, although he was active on the photo sharing site Flickr:

OT: I don't check my emails every day either, like some people race home, sometimes I wait for three days and then I think, "Oh damn I'd better get back in touch with them, somebody's probably waiting for a reply and wondering what's going on".

Q: So you're not a big online person?

OT: Not really, no.

Three participants felt totally comfortable with computers, while a fourth found computers frustrating even though she acknowledged that others saw her as very computer literate, and as the person others would go to for help. These participants had a high level of comfort with media sharing sites and had actively sought to engage through media sharing platforms (e.g. Flickr, Red Bubble) by creating their own blogs or by being active in internet forums.

The remaining half of the participants expressed the feeling described by Bell (2009) as the "perpetual sense of being slightly behind". MB is confident with computers but not as comfortable "as the kids nowadays who just get up and do it." DC described a sense of knowing there was much she didn't understand:

I know there's so many things I don't know how to use. I feel comfortable when I stick to the same thing that, if I'm shown something, I'm right - but I don't like having to be trying to work something out by myself. I still have a little bit of a fear of stuffing something up.

However, this sense did not necessarily relate to actual ability. While HS was fairly confident with using media editing software, he did not rate his skills as being particularly high. Further prompting revealed that HS rated his digital literacy in terms of his ability to program, perhaps relating his skills to those of others in his age group. He said that he was comfortable using computers, but that "as for programming things, my computer skills are very limited". The data collected from HS demonstrates that even those who have a degree of proficiency in areas which are important to them may still feel they have much to learn.

This range of experience indicates a complex picture of digital literacy. But the extent to which different levels or types of experience might constitute a barrier to entry in participating in media production is unclear. All the research participants were clearly motivated to be involved, and so had overcome whatever barriers they had encountered. The frequency of participation was, however, in part affected by limitations on their own time and on internet speed.

4.3 Connectivity

MB runs a property, home schools her children, and is involved in a number of local volunteer activities. She initially became involved in ABC Open through the monthly photography challenge Snapped, although at the time of interview she had not contributed for that month's theme as it did not appeal to her. For her it was "a time thing, I'd like to do it more often, it just can't be a priority for me right at the moment...I've just got to find ten minutes so I can do it".

Internet speed was a significant factor for one participant. OS lives in a small outer regional town, where internet and even phone access is a continuing frustration: "We have home phones that cut out sometimes a week at a time, mobile phones that don't work properly, internet that's appalling." OS would like to be more active but admitted that her problems with accessing the internet mean she doesn't like being at the computer for long periods of time. She described the slow and frustrating internet access in her area as a significant barrier to entry. Despite this, OS has created her own blog and has overcome the barrier of a poor internet connection to pursue her own interests and needs.

Yet those who did have a fast internet connection did not necessarily participate more often. Despite living in a regional city, OT did not spend a lot of time online. DC lives in a large regional centre. She sends emails and more recently has joined Facebook but "might be lucky to get on there once a week". DC also enjoys writing letters. HS lives in a small town and while he did not specify how much time he spent online, he indicated he was more likely to telephone people to get in touch than to contact them via the internet.

Again, the data did not present a clear picture. While a lack of internet speed was a significant barrier, it was not a deterrent. While faster speeds made life easier, they did not equate with a higher level of participation.

4.4 Developing routines of practice

All of the research participants in this study can be considered ‘prosumers’ (Bruns 2007) or part of the active audience, and by their very interaction with ABC Open as an online publishing platform demonstrated not only the effect of technology on their capacity to connect with others, but also their own ability to overcome barriers to entry and to engage in representing their experiences and creative works to online audiences. While the internet has brought substantial change to the way people interact with those they know, these ABC Open contributors have also chosen to interact with those they don’t know, and to seek audiences for their stories and photographs.

All of the research participants had contributed to ABC Open at least several times and across a range of projects. For all of these participants, involvement with ABC Open was more than a once-off activity, although the range and level of involvement varied. All had developed new practices and more than half had developed new routines as a result of their involvement with ABC Open. These routines varied, from contributing every month to contributing every few months, or quite sporadically.

TG began contributing to the 500 Words monthly writing project and was in part motivated by the fact that other people were also contributing each month:

It gives you an excuse because when you’re working, you’ve got your everyday life and you are busy, it’s easy to [say], you just don’t have time for that, but if you’ve got a specific task you can say oh, here’s a deadline, here’s a task, and it can also give you inspiration too.

Since being interviewed TG continued to write each month for the following nine months, and has also contributed to the monthly photography project and as a guest blogger.

Some participants had been active across a range of social and other media platforms prior to their involvement with ABC Open, while others were newly engaged with the concept of creating content to share online. However, whether or not they had prior experience with other online platforms, their routines were not exclusively centred on ABC Open, but also encompassed social media and other online publishing outside of the context of the ABC.

OS was a prolific writer before coming across ABC Open - a process she described as 'journaling' - but until she became involved she had only shared some of her written work with family and friends. She became involved with ABC Open through the 500 Words project, and enjoyed the challenge of writing on a different theme each month.

Participating in ABC Open has connected her with other contributors:

When June Perkins [another contributor] read one of my stories I looked up her name to see who she was and I read some of them and I loved them, and I went on to Google and I found a blog and I followed her blog. I've never followed a blog in my life! So there's a bit of that I'm now doing. Again the internet frustrations get in the way of me doing that too much, and I don't like being at the computer for long periods of time, so I can't say that I would follow a whole lot of people because of that.

Despite initially being a regular contributor, at the time of interview in January 2013, OS had not published on ABC Open since June 2013. Yet OS continues to publish to her own blog, a practice she hadn't considered until she came across ABC Open, because she thought "it was something that whingey mummies did". Since attending an ABC Open workshop about blogging, OS established her own online presence, which includes publishing her written work and photographs, primarily of her own artwork, which she also promotes through Facebook.

BG had also established a blog since becoming involved in ABC Open. BG has been a contributor since the first ABC Open project, and overall has published over 30 items including photographs, text pieces and one video, as well as collaborating on an audio slideshow. BG's blog has connected her with people all over world; she has even been interviewed about it by the BBC.

FG had already been active on social platforms, so contributing to ABC Open was an extension of his previous patterns of behaviour. At the time of writing he has published over 150 photos on the ABC Open site and has also begun to write for the monthly 500 Words writing project and to try his hand at video. FG contributes to a range of other media sharing platforms primarily based around photography, and has added ABC Open to his routine of publishing content online.

However, not all the participants had developed routines. HS said he likes to create, and had appreciated the recognition that comes with publishing online, but he was not intrinsically drawn to contribute regularly:

I think if I saw a project that appealed to me then I would [contribute] and to be fair the projects I've done I've felt they've appealed to me and I can whip something up for that, that's OK, but I just don't want to be, how can I put it, I'm not comfortable doing it for every one...I'd rather come up with less material but have it be really good.

HS is driven by a desire to improve his skills. Participation in his case is, as Jenkins describes, more situational than routine.

Although OT was a prolific contributor to the Now and Then project he was unsure about whether he would continue to contribute. He said, "It depends on what it is." OT is primarily interested in history and in exploring new photographic techniques. Although he has contributed to two photography projects since Now and Then, the number of images he has contributed is much lower than it was to the Now and Then project.

The data collected showed that contributors upload only when it suits their needs. ABC Open seeks to develop habits of participation, but competes with other online platforms e.g. YouTube and Flickr. One of the key offerings of ABC Open - free workshops primarily advertised around teaching technical skills in photography, video and writing - has provided a routine way for contributors to meet and to develop a regular practice of creating and uploading content.

All research participants had pre-existing skills in these areas, and for some participants, part of their motivation to become involved related to brushing up on skills which had become rusty and learning more about digital technology. This was a strong motivator for several of participants, who felt that ABC Open gave them both a creative challenge and an outlet. For these people the workshops reinforced skills they already had, and in many cases taught them new skills. Reinforcing and practising skills were also important to these participants. TG described this as "an opportunity that I'd probably pay for if I was in the city."

Content creation was the primary focus of going to workshops, and the development of technical skills (particularly photographic and video skills, including editing) was mentioned by all the participants and is explored more fully in the following chapter. Although all participants were highly interested in publishing online and some had needed to develop at least some skills in order to do this, this was not highlighted in any of the interviews.

ABC Open seeks to develop routines of practice amongst contributors through regular offline activities such as workshops, and regular callouts to contributors, e.g. the monthly writing and photography projects, or the release of new projects. In terms of these research participants, this has been partly successful, although it should be noted that the participants themselves, as noted above, represent a group that is at the top end of engagement. For some participants, the impetus to develop a routine of creative practice was appealing. BG described the continual development of ABC Open projects as attractive and satisfying:

[I] like going on to the website and clicking on projects, just to see what's up at the moment, and sometimes I miss the deadline, sadly, but I just love that challenge, it's exciting! And it looks like oh this one will be fun, or I've never tried this before or I know just the person for that sort of thing.

Although at the time of interview TG had only contributed once, the regularity of the projects was appealing to him:

TG: I'd like to do the monthly photo comp, and the 500 Words I'll try and do that too. It can be hard to find an excuse to write or an excuse to take photos, so I'd like to try and do all of those.

Q: Do you think that having the monthly challenge, that's the thing that works for you?

TG: That's definitely the thing for me is having, 'cause it's the community and you know other people are doing it, it's more motivating.

Since being interviewed, TG contributed every month to 500 Words until September 2013. He also contributed to Snapped for several months. By January 2104, he had published 23 photos and stories on the ABC Open website.

At the time of writing (January 2014) the routines of many of the participants seem to have stalled or ceased. Three have not contributed for more than 8 months. Others have developed routines which include more labour intensive activity, e.g. FG's contributions have somewhat slowed, yet now include video, at least one of which is a relatively complex narrative. BG's pattern of contribution has been to upload content every few months, however her last contribution was in August 2013.

4.5 Conclusion

While the ABC has helped to develop routines of practice amongst contributors, these may in fact be, as Jenkins (2006) suggests, tactical and temporary. Their practices are fluid, and not fixed to one project or platform. As the online environment rapidly changes, new platforms emerge. The capacity to engage, once developed, can be applied across platforms, routinely or occasionally, depending on the motivations of participants. For some participants, patterns of online behaviour were already established prior to ABC Open. For these participants, ABC Open may be one of many platforms they engage with when it suits their needs. As FG described it:

When it comes to knowing what's going on on the internet I consider myself to be fairly well informed and there are some things out there that have no relevance to me, but I'm aware that they exist, and if I got involved in something to which they were relevant, I'd know where to go and what to do.

Participants like FG may participate for a period of time then move on to other platforms, or may continue to contribute to the ABC Open website, although the regularity of their contributions might vary over time. As FG put it:

I mean I'm going to take photos anyway, so where I put them is, you want to try and stay relevant, so the things I put on Facebook are not necessarily the things I put on Flickr and the things I put on Flickr are not necessarily the things I put on ABC Open's website. I try to keep what I do relevant to the forum that I'm using, or to the medium I'm using, so in the future if ABC Open does another Up Close or something like that, obviously I'd be looking to extend myself in that direction, to push myself to try and find new things that are relevant to that,

but it's not a problem that at the moment those photos aren't necessarily relevant and I'm not including them on ABC Open.

For DC, engagement with ABC Open has been short lived. The intention to participate is not always realised, as other tasks become prioritised. While at the time of interview DC indicated that she was interested in continuing to contribute, she said she would be unlikely to do so if it didn't suit her needs. DC enjoyed the sense of being "all in it together" although that wasn't reason enough to keep contributing: "No, I'd only be doing it if it suits me to keep doing it."

Yet for some participants, ABC Open has opened up new ways of interacting online. This is clearly evident in relation to the ongoing routines of two of the female participants - BG and OS - who both write blogs, a practice developed as a direct result of ABC Open. The blogs are both active at the time of writing.

CHAPTER 5 MOTIVATION

5.1 Introduction

ABC Open relies on the involvement of citizens in creating media – without these contributors ABC Open has no reason to exist. Thus a key concern of ABC Open, according to former project co-director, Ann Chesterman, is trying to understand the factors that might motivate contributors, and creating conditions that are conducive to participating:

We always think about it a lot. That's the first question you ask - why would anyone want to do this, and how easy is it for them to do it, and how long will it take for them to do it? Very quickly we realised how important that question was in terms of getting people to participate. And also how easy is it for people to understand what you're asking them to do. We learnt very early on that it had to be really simple to grasp.

This chapter will analyse the field data collected through the in-depth interviews in terms of the intrinsic motivational factors of autonomy, competence and relatedness identified in Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory. It will also consider the data in terms of Shirky's (2008) analysis which identifies knowledge, vanity and usefulness as the drivers for online participatory behaviour.

Ryan and Deci (2000) describe both competence and autonomy as 'innate psychological needs'. These factors are inter-related. A sense of autonomy and being in control feeds into feelings of competence, of being able to achieve personal goals (in the case of ABC Open this may include the desire to increase skills) which in turn may reinforce feelings of autonomy. In addition, the presentation of material to a wide audience and positive audience feedback can lead to a sense of competence, while also appealing to a person's vanity.

The data shows that these factors work in various combinations, which differ between participants. One participant may be more motivated by autonomy and competence, while another may have a stronger desire to increase competence and be useful. The combination of these factors is demonstrated through the experience of TG, who is interested in using and developing his skills, being part of a creative community and finding an audience:

I suppose [it's] a combination of learning new stuff, meeting people and talking about it, and practising...It's an opportunity that I'd probably pay for if I was in the city, I'd become a part of a photography group or a writers group or you know get involved as much as I can. So an opportunity was there so I took it. And part of it's learning, even if some of the things I sort of already know, you sort of go and you refresh some stuff or you pick some new stuff up or have a bit of a practice or meet people, part of it is meeting people and being part of the community with similar interests, so that's probably the main reasons, and then because with ABC Open cause there's an outlet for it too, you sort of have an audience too.

The importance of autonomy as an underlying condition for online engagement is worth noting. As previously mentioned, online participation is voluntary and tactical. Not participating does not lead to negative consequences, and being involved is a matter of free choice and personal agency. A sense of autonomy was expressed by participants in terms of being in control of developing the skills they wanted, of being able to select how and when to become involved and under what conditions their participation would occur.

Across the research participants, the key motivations for involvement related to at least two of Ryan and Deci's factors of self-determination. Participants described these factors as a desire to brush up on old skills or learn new skills (competence); to be involved in activities that are of interest to them, and tell stories that matter to them (autonomy); and the pleasure of creating content to share with others in a local group and with a broad online audience (relatedness). Significantly, the desire to increase competence, to use or learn new skills, was common to all the participants.

The importance of local stories and local connections created through ABC Open also emerged as a theme. This theme relates to a sense of autonomy and usefulness, both locally and through the national media network of the ABC. Some research participants indicated a high level of interest in telling local stories (to both local and non-local audiences), and a strong sense of responsibility to tell stories about regional Australia that might not otherwise be told.

Other participants were motivated by the ability to make local connections and meet like-

minded people offline. This offline interaction will be explored further in Chapter 6.

5.2 Knowledge and competence

One of the key motivating factors identified by research participants was the chance to learn new skills, or to brush up on skills they had previously acquired but had not used for some time. ABC Open provides free workshops, teaching creative and technical skills including photography, videography, video and photo editing and writing for online publication, amongst other topics. It's important to note that participants for this research project were likely to have heard of the skills training element of ABC Open before attending a workshop or meeting, so it's not surprising that this was among the strongest motivations nominated by participants.

FG had been an avid photographer, but had not practised for some time. He had recently become interested in digital photography and wanted to develop skills in this area:

At the time I went along to the ABC Open workshop [I] had only really gotten back into photography probably in the last twelve months or so, so I guess my attraction was sort of reinforcing some of the skills that I had that were fairly rusty and I guess picking up new skills, and meeting other people that I knew would be attending that are interested in similar things.

FG's main motivator was to challenge himself creatively and to improve his photographic and writing skills. His routine of practice was centred on pushing himself to try new things:

I guess what I'm trying to do is, for myself as a photographer, to get better at taking photos, get better at seeing things to take photos of. So this *Snapped* theme for me is to focus myself for a month on a particular theme, and force me to think creatively about that theme. At the moment with *Reflections*, on Sunday I went for a walk within a couple of blocks of home looking for ways to take interesting photos of reflections. So it's a way to force myself to turn what might be a mundane photo into something a little bit more interesting.

BG had been a practising community artist and teacher and had done a lot of photographic work over the years. She was interested in exploring digital storytelling, using still images and audio to tell a story:

I love the idea of using still photographs and I thought I'd like to learn that technique...Originally I wanted to learn new ways of doing things and I'm interested in filmmaking and the like, that's why the digital stories fulfils me, like a hobby in a way. I know I'm never going to professionally be able to develop any of these ideas, but I see it as good fun. Because they're challenging little projects that people are thinking up, they really make you think outside of the box. Like, say, photographic techniques, like the Up Close one, I'd never done that sort of photography before, so I had to learn how to use my camera in that way.

Interestingly BG didn't always contribute if she didn't think her content was skilful.

I tried the light painting one, although I didn't think my work was successful so I didn't put anything in, but I had a lot of fun with that, playing around with that idea.

The sense of mastery for these participants was developed by being challenged, whether that was to think creatively during a given time frame or to use an unfamiliar technique. BG also participated in the Portrait of A Stranger project, where contributors were invited to "find a willing subject; someone who is a stranger and who is happy to share their story... Challenge yourself to talk to and photograph at least five strangers, and to find out a bit more about each person you meet" (ABC Open, 2011). BG enjoyed that project:

That was really great because that really pushed me to talk to people that I didn't know at all. And just approach them and somebody would say, "Oh, so and so's interesting, go and see if they'll do it."

DC was interested in writing, but what piqued her interest was the focus on recording audio:

It was something new and it was just learning about recording, ways in the program that you can edit out the question, things like that, and I thought that sounds like a really interesting thing to learn about.

After participating in The Moment Behind the Photo project, CB joined in with the writing project, 500 Words, and found the process of learning pleasurable:

I think it was just, because it was so pleasurable, the stories behind the photos thing, I think I just felt that it was going to be another thing that I was going to learn, because I like learning new stuff.

OT participated in the Now and Then project, which involved taking new photographs of archival photos situated in the original location where they were first taken. OT was driven to participate by both the desire to share his personal photographic archive, and also because he was attracted by the opportunity to learn a new skill which he felt would add value to this archive:

Well, it was kind of a mixture of everything really. I was interested in the photography side of it and also the end results, that [Now and Then] image was kind of like Photoshop without the computer, it was virtually all done on the camera and yeah that concept was refreshing in a way, it was something I can't really believe I hadn't thought of it myself.

In one instance, the opportunity to collaborate with an ABC producer had assisted the learning process. HS liked the idea of collaborating with someone from the ABC:

I thought it would be good to work with an actual journalist on a documentary...and yeah to join forces with someone who really knew what they were doing in terms of journalism was a really great help.

The parameters set for each project, both in terms of the themes and the techniques used, provided a challenge for participants. OS said she was interested in becoming a better writer, and that she found completing a story that was within the word limit of 500 Words was rewarding:

I like the fact, cause they're not huge parameters, but it gives me enough to focus on. When I write I'm always too wordy, the first draft will inevitably have 800 to 1000 words, and I'll cull from there, but I actually like that, I actually think that's made me a better writer. I find I'm less wordy now the more projects I do, and what I realise about my writing now, because of that, is that it's becoming more punchy, which I think is a good thing actually.

The desire to increase competence was also evident in answers relating to the least satisfying components of being involved with ABC Open. FG was motivated in part by being creatively and technically challenged. Some of this challenge was created by the different

themes set by ABC Open, and some by learning new skills and techniques. However, FG felt that workshops were generally pitched at a beginner level, and were becoming less challenging as time went on:

I'm noticing that at the moment nothing seems to go beyond first gear so there's a lot of workshops for beginners and things like that, it doesn't really go much beyond that. So at some point, I guess...it's probably going to be like, there's a workshop on tonight about writing and blogging and things like that, I've done two, I don't expect that this will be any different to the last two I've done, and because I'm already writing and blogging and writing things for 500 Words and writing in all different kinds of ways I don't think I'm going to get enough out of it to warrant spending the time going.

OS felt she could get more out of ABC Open:

They set one project a month, and once I've done that, I'm ready to move on. So for instance if there was the theme of the month and then there was also [the opportunity to] write a story about a current event in your area, like once a week, well I would do that, I'd be happy to contribute in that way...if we opened it up so that community members are blogging about community happenings, much like I said, a newspaper full of columns, I think that would be really interesting.

Skills development is also important to the ABC. The ABC Open website states that “people of all skill levels are welcome”, yet Chesterman said that contributions which demonstrated some degree of skill were able to assist ABC Open with achieving its goal of finding audiences for the content:

Some skills make a huge difference in terms of the quality and in terms of the success of that piece of content getting an audience anywhere, even if it's just on the website. But that sort of skill can be as much in storytelling as the actual technical skills. I think that's probably most important, having an idea and having a story and being able to tell it effectively. It doesn't necessarily have to be technically great but it does have to [have] a good sense of communication if nothing else.

5.3 Autonomy

While competence and mastery are important to intrinsic motivation, Deci and Ryan (2000) have determined that autonomy is a crucial support for these two factors. The ability to be

a causal agent in one's own life and to act in harmony with one's needs requires an ability to make independent decisions and to be self-directed. If participants do not feel a sense of agency and self-direction, they are much less likely to be motivated to act, regardless of their feelings of competence. At the same time, feelings of competence, or being able to master tasks to achieve personal goals, are crucial to a sense of autonomy and self-direction.

All of the research participants came to ABC Open of their own volition, acting autonomously and without any sense of compulsion to become involved, simply interested in pursuing their own goals. All had initially made contact after seeing or hearing publicity about an upcoming workshop or project or, in MB's case, seeing other ABC Open contributions on her local ABC Facebook page.

MB's experience demonstrates the voluntary nature of participatory practice that all participants expressed to some degree. MB had initially responded to a photograph she had seen on the local ABC radio station's Facebook page, and made contact with the local ABC Open producer. She contributed several photographs to the Snapped: Faceless Portraits project, which were then promoted on Facebook both through ABC Open and the local ABC website. Following on from this, the producer approached MB and together they organised the first in a series of workshops in the small town near her property. She has received positive feedback particularly from ABC staff, and two of her images have been used in ABC Open publicity.

MB is highly motivated to tell stories of regional life. She was already active on Flickr and Facebook before contributing to ABC Open:

MB: I enjoy sharing my photos and I enjoy promoting where we live and our interpretation of where we live and what we do, as in living on the land. And I really enjoy promoting that to other people that may not be aware of what we do, and how we do it, and why we do it, and I see photography as a way of promoting that, and probably through ABC Open it's a bit of a larger platform to be able to do that. But generally I just really enjoy sharing my photos and you know getting feedback on how I think I'm going and what I'm doing.

Q: And why is that promotion of where you live and the way you live, why is it important?

MB: Because I think that the majority of Australians nowadays live in coastal areas, they don't understand, a lot of people don't understand or even can relate to how we live...they don't understand what we do and why we do it.

MB's motivation is clearly related to autonomy, she is driven by a strong sense of who she is and what she wants to communicate. However, she has not been a consistent contributor to ABC Open, although she has set up and organizes a Facebook group for local photographers, setting regular photography themes for the group:

I suppose in a way I've instigated quite a bit on that page. So I made the suggestion that every week we either practise a theme or practise settings or something like that. So I'm the one that goes on once a week and instigates what we're going to do for that week. But other than that I do do quite a bit independently.

Unsurprisingly, the subject matter of each project impacted significantly on whether participants were likely to contribute. While ABC Open contributors do not choose the themes of projects, the participants voted with their feet when it came to contributing. For example, MB was driven to contribute photographs that fit with her goal of showing people what life is like in remote Australia. The Snapped: Letterboxes project did not hold interest for her, and did not fit with this goal.

MB: I'll probably only contribute to projects that I really, really want to, in saying that this month I think is post-boxes

Q: And you're not interested?

MB: I'm not interested, I mean, if I had an image there that I felt was good I'd put it up, it's just taking photos of post-boxes is not really something that I would do, unless it was really unique. So no I won't be contributing this month, but it just depends on what the project is.

MB has a strong sense of the story she wants to tell, yet is also motivated by finding an audience for these stories. She initially became involved in ABC Open because she "just saw it as an opportunity to share photos of what we do and why we do it...it was just more a platform of sharing". Yet despite being successful in reaching an audience through the ABC, she has ceased contributing to ABC Open.

MB's experience contrasted with that of BG. BG was also strongly driven to participate by her sense of having important stories to tell, although they related more to a desire to help others in her community:

I'm interested in individual stories, through my work with murals I've come in touch with lots of different types of communities and learnt that everybody has a story to tell that's important.

BG participated in ABC Open's first project, and although she couldn't remember how she first heard of ABC Open, she did remember coming along to a meeting and trying to bring some friends along. She said she is always "very keen to involve other people with things", although her own involvement with groups tends to be informal. BG is active in several local groups, but does not enjoy meetings or organizing things: "No, no, I'm not interested, I'd rather have a bit more freedom to work with my own ideas and move around and I support a lot of things, but I can't, I don't want to go to meetings."

BG, then, was primarily driven to pursue her own goal of developing positive outcomes within her community through storytelling. One example of this was her involvement with the Dreambox project, which involved photographing Indigenous Australians holding a chalkboard on which they had written an answer to the question "What's your dream?":

When I did the projects, you know the Dreambox one, I worked with students who I've been tutoring at the high school. I wasn't working with them anymore and I could see the voice (it gave) to those kids, some self recognition as much as general recognition of their special heritage. I value that sort of thing, and I know how proud they were of the whole thing.

The project structure of ABC Open was not seen as a hindrance by BG, who found the parameters a useful way of concentrating on a particular technique or pushing herself to do something she had not tried before. While she did not contribute to each project, this was primarily related to whether or not she felt she had had time to master the project brief and had created something worth sharing. As mentioned above, she had attempted the Light Painting theme for the Snapped project but was not pleased with her results, so she did not upload them. In this way, BG was not driven by any sense of responsibility to the ABC, to other contributors, or to an audience, but was driven by a sense of using the ABC to pursue her own goals.

In the context of this research, autonomy also relates to a sense of authorship. Feelings of autonomy can be experienced through the mastering of technical skills or through choosing the subject matter and shaping the editorial content of a story. The extent to which research participants felt autonomous was a matter of degree. Some were given strong direction from ABC Open producers, while others felt a sense of having absolute authorship and control over the content they had created. While some reported that they were willing to relinquish some autonomy in order to learn, the experience was more satisfying when they felt truly self-directed and were able to operate without editorial assistance.

While BG generally operated autonomously, this had not been the case at the beginning, and at first she found the hands on approach of her local producer to be too much: "I was a bit edgy because I'm used to doing things my way, so to work with somebody who obviously had a lot of experience and ideas of his own, it took me a little while."

BG worked on ABC Open's first project, One on One: Change, and although she chose the subject matter, she was not experienced in interviewing and was given detailed direction by her local producer.

BG: I've got a little Zoom H2, so I did some audio with [the interviewee] and then [the ABC Open producer] came and we did some with [the producer's] gadget and yeah it was quite confusing in the beginning to work out what would be used and what wouldn't, but [the ABC Open producer] took it away and he edited it. And I realised then what he was trying to get at...

Q: And did you give [the ABC Open producer] direction as to what was going to be edited into the final piece?

BG: No, not really, and I found that a bit hard to begin with, but I think he was right and I'm sure he was right, in taking over that because I think I was a bit confused at that point.

However, BG reported that after working together on this project, the producer was much less hands on:

I think in the early stages when people are beginning to learn he probably does [do the post production] but if you've got an idea, like with some of the other workshops I've done, like you know, the Now and Then one, he's happy to show you the technique and ideas and meaning, but then leave you alone to do it.

BG found great satisfaction in the Portrait of a Stranger project because she was pushed to overcome her fears of approaching people:

The idea of approaching somebody I didn't know, I was quite nervous about that, but when I overcame that, like, I could do that again much more easily now.

HS's experience also demonstrated that the intrinsic motivation to tell a story that mattered to him was stronger than simply the invitation to become involved. HS was initially motivated by the desire to tell a specific story about the demise of a local industrial practice. Since then he has continued to contribute stories, but with less purpose:

Since then I've written and done a few things for ABC Open where I feel I'm just sort of filling in the numbers. Like, I've been asked to contribute and I'm more than happy to contribute, but it doesn't seem as important as the [original] piece.

For these participants, autonomy was an important factor. Participants were most motivated and satisfied when they found a project, technique or idea that met their own goals and needs, and least interested and satisfied when they felt they were not fully self-directed.

5.4 Relatedness and purpose

Deci and Ryan (2000) identify relatedness as a key need for the attainment of goals, for optimal psychological health and well-being. Relatedness refers to "the desire to feel connected to others – to love and care and be loved and cared for" (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p. 231).

In Shirky's 2008 observations of online participation, he identifies the desire to be part of something bigger than oneself as a key motivating factor. Citing the work of Yochai Benkler he argues that this social motivation, and being part of a group, supports a sense of both

mastery and purpose. “The motivation to share is the driver, technology is just the enabler” (Shirky, 2010, pp79-80/214).

Daniel Pink (2000) describes this as “the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves” (p. 10/242). And, he argues, “the most deeply motivated people – not to mention those who are most productive and satisfied – hitch their desires to a cause larger than themselves” (p. 133/242).

Ann Chesterman recognized this as a motivating factor that ABC Open attempts to harness. ABC Open organises content into projects, each with a specific theme and sometimes focused around a particular technique. Chesterman described the attempt to bring people together for a common cause as one of the reasons for using the project structure as a mechanism for engagement. She said that ABC Open had used a project structure to give people a focus and:

to get people to be part of something bigger than themselves, to be part of a project that other people were into and to make them feel like they were part of something that was growing and had lots of different voices in it. So it was the idea of the town square but through projects, through a shared goal and a sharing of stories.

Some research participants confirmed this sense of being part of something beyond themselves. CD related that she felt a sense of being “in it together”, while TG enjoyed knowing that others were also contributing each month. BG enjoyed the breadth of ABC Open:

And I’m so impressed with it, it is fantastic isn’t it? It seems to have such a large scope and it’s reaching so much of the whole country, and the work that people are coming up with is fascinating.

However, a sense of being something larger than themselves was not a strong motivating factor for most participants, although, as described further in Chapter 6, it was a welcome consequence for some participants.

The exception was BG, who had a deep sense of the value of all people’s stories, which went beyond her own creative work. She actively encourages people in her community to

tell their stories. She has been a key supporter of ABC Open in her local region, encouraging others in the community to become involved:

BG: There were about half a dozen of us also and, you know, I knew most of them, I'd been talking with people saying "come along".

Q: So you helped bring some others along did you?

BG: Yes, I'm very keen to involve other people with things, they're just not always able to but you do what you can.

BG was also motivated to tell stories for a broader audience:

I like new challenges but also the public benefit of something is important to me. Working with community arts and painting local community murals in country towns or factories or stockyards, wherever they were, suburban shopping centres, schools, the whole essence of it came from that community, so they could be proud of what they'd achieved or their history or whatever. So to do projects like the Portrait of A Stranger one, it's very important to me that individuals or groups get recognition for what they do as being unique, you know, because I think there's a lot of disenchantment [in] people around [here], you see that a lot in schools.

BG had a strong belief that community storytelling is important:

BG: The thing that interests me now is digital photography. Now everyone can take pictures through ABC Open, it's totally accessible to anybody, and I love that and I really do try to encourage other people to get involved. I find people often not quite confident enough of their work, you know 'it's just snaps that I'm taking', they don't realise that other people might enjoy them or learn from them.

Q: So you're actually, in your local area, just trying to encourage more people to get involved are you?

BG: Oh very much so, yes.

Q: And have you had any luck with that?

BG: Yes, a few people but no, not enough. I think I'm actually going to have to go and sit with them and do the uploading and the like the first few times, I'll have to become more pushy!

5.5 Local stories

A number of scholars support the idea that the internet fosters local as well as distant communication (Wellman & Hampton, 1999; Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2002; Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2002; Rheingold, 2006). In the participatory media model, local stories and contributions may also foster a sense of local relevance, while at the same time the ability to share local stories with those further afield can reinforce a sense of the significance of geographical location. In the case of ABC Open, where content is organised along regional lines, there is an inherent emphasis on the importance of place.

The responses of the research participants varied in terms of the significance they placed on local stories. For TG the universality of a story, not the particularly local aspect of it, was most important:

For me it's more the human experience, not so much the local experience. I like to think that when I write something, that's universally applicable. It's not what life is like out there, it's what life is like to me regardless of where you are. So for me it's not so much a desire to tell a local story, but to tell a human story.

However, other participants put a much greater emphasis on the importance of the local stories they wanted to tell. For MB, telling local stories about "how we live" and "what we do" was highly significant. While the stories she told were self-determined, she had a strong desire to share these stories with others, "because I think everyone needs to be aware of what other individuals do and vice versa".

BG is interested in all stories but has been particularly active in recording local stories, and she sees ABC Open as one of a number of avenues for this kind of local community storytelling. BG was interested in reaching a range of audiences, both locally and further afield:

Friends and family of course are terribly important but I like the idea of the local community relating to it. That's important to me. And anything outside of there, that's a plus, because there's a lot that happens here that is unknown to outside areas. Like I've taken a lot of photographs, we have this crazy demolition [derby], do you know that sort of thing? And I want to exhibit those sometime...the guys...they just love the whole concept of it. And I made one of those online books that they can't seem to get enough of, so that's an example of something being very important locally, and my family and friends all enjoy it, but I would like to show them out of the [local] environment. I'll do that, I'll take them somewhere, just to show something that's happening uniquely in this area.

Local stories can also be significant in a more personal sense. OT is a member of the local historical society and first became aware of ABC Open as a result of ABC Open publicity which was distributed through the society. OT has a rich photographic archive containing many photographs taken by his grandfather and father, many of which detail the industrial history of the region. He had previously looked for ways to use this archive, including taking present-day photographs to sit side by side with the originals. When he became aware of the technique used in the Now and Then project, where an old photograph is held within the frame of a newly taken image in the same location, he could see the potential for his own collection:

I just happened to be at [a member of the historical society's] place to pick up some paperwork and she had it up on the screen with the Now and Then picture there, and as soon as I saw it I thought straightaway, wow, that looks incredible, I wouldn't mind giving that a go.

His grandfather's photographs are particularly important to him:

OT: My grandfather's photos...all sort of meant more than the other images, because I use images from all over the place and some of them are mine, some are my father's, some are my grandfather's, and some were taken by total strangers, so I source the images from a wide variety of sources.

Q: So was it more about your personal connection to the story rather than the bigger, general history of the place?

OT: Yes, it was more the personal connection.

Yet OT also describes the most satisfying aspect of ABC Open as "getting the opportunity to get my grandfather's photos published virtually".

5.6 Recognition and audience

While autonomous creativity and the pursuit of audience can co-exist, there can be a tension between the two. Traditional media practices operate within highly constructed genres. These relate to technical specifications, for example the framing of video shots, to the duration of broadcast or published content, or to ideas of relevance to a particular audience group. Individual creativity is not always expressed within these boundaries, yet ABC Open attempts to harness the creative output of contributors within these parameters.

ABC Open not only publishes content on its website, but distributes selected content across other ABC platforms. ABC Open provides a weekly program to ABC News 24, as well as four interstitials (i.e. 3 minute stories) which are played between news bulletins during weekdays. A short weekly program of one video story was broadcast before the 7pm news bulletin on ABC 1 on Friday nights from August 2013 until May 2014 (these stories are now occasionally screened although the scheduled spot has been re-commissioned due to other schedule changes). As well as this, audio content is distributed across various ABC radio programs and websites, and photographs are shared through ABC websites and social media.

ABC Open is not solely concerned with allowing members of the public to tell their own stories, but also has the purpose of finding audiences for this content. This relationship is complex – audiences drive contributions and, in turn, contributions which suit traditional broadcast genres are crucial to extending the reach of ABC Open across other ABC platforms.

Contributions are framed within relatively tight constraints which take the form of guidelines or, in some cases, rules. These rules include legal requirements, compliance with ABC Open's Community Guidelines, and editorial constraints. For example, the Objects Stories project (ABC Open, 2013a) invites stories about objects "which together tell the story of Australian life". The project page stipulates that contributors must choose a single object, not a collection, as the subject for their story. The project seeks specific stories about particular objects, and asks contributors to: "Choose an object that you, or the

person telling the story, really knows about.” Objects are defined as: “something that can be physically moved”. Public monuments are ruled out.

Other projects include rules (in some projects these are described as guidelines, although most recently they are described as Dos and Don’ts) about story duration, theme and style (e.g. that a story should be told in the first person). In the monthly photography projects, these include not only legal requirements, but also rules about how creatively individuals can interpret each month’s theme. All contributions across the ABC Open site are moderated for compliance with the editorial brief of each project.

According to Chesterman, the project-based model of ABC Open is not intended to limit participation, but to make it easier:

[It] is really about giving people a focus. So instead of asking for anything and getting a huge range of content and not knowing what we would do with it, the idea of projects [is] to give people more specific parameters which would make their decision-making a lot easier in terms of everything, from how long it was going to be, and what format it was going to be.

Chesterman sees the project structure as a two-fold mechanism, which allows people freedom to produce within these constraints, while at the same time encouraging a sense of being part of something larger. Once stories are contributed, the ABC Open producers and other staff then assess the contributions to find content that is suitable for distribution on other platforms.

In contributing to ABC Open, participants acceded to these constraints. For some participants this was a motivating challenge, which, as outlined above, increased feelings of competence. In addition, gaining a response from the ABC and its audience led to feelings of satisfaction.

The role of the ABC and its staff as the first audience for the content was noted by OS, who commented on the degree to which the ABC’s recognition of her work as worth being published added to her satisfaction:

You know if I publish it goes to [the producer] who moderates it, does a bit of editing on the

website and there it is, so there's a certain level of approval there, but if I publish to my own blog, this sounds really vain! – but there's no, because I've published it myself I guess the psychology is that it's not received approval, do you know what I mean?

These comments support the findings of Deci and Ryan (2000) that positive feedback fosters feelings of competence and enhances intrinsic motivation when those feelings of competence are also accompanied by a sense of autonomy. For OS, this seems to be the case. The work she created autonomously received the approval of the ABC, indicating that the content was good enough to publish and that someone thought it might be useful and interesting to other people. This fed her intrinsic motivation to participate.

Most participants framed the question of audience in terms of recognition. For example, MB reported that the most satisfying part of her involvement in ABC Open was “probably the exposure, and it is rewarding having other people recognise your work.”

Recognition and the sense of an audience mattered to some participants more than others. Participants were asked questions about three groups of people – their family and friends, locals they didn't know and people at a distance they didn't know – and the relative importance of receiving recognition from each of these groups. The sense of an audience was more related to those people whom the contributor did not know, while recognition was more broadly understood to include family and friends. The value each participant placed on receiving this recognition and any feedback differed widely.

TG said writing was partly therapeutic for him, but an audience was also important: “When I write, I write to be read, yeah, so everybody, everyone and anyone”. Similarly BG was interested in attracting a broad audience to her work: “Yes, yes, I like to bring things to a broad audience, yes, I can see that the website does that because it's Australia wide and it's opened up a lot of places in Australia to me too.”

For these two contributors, family and friends were important, but gaining a response from people beyond of friends and family was also important:

TG: It's somewhat important, like, you know it's just nice if someone you know has read it and said that's cool, and if I get a better name in the community, that's good too. 'Cause it's a small town obviously, the more people who understand you and what you're on about, it

makes being in the community more enjoyable. Yeah, so it's sort of important.

Q: And what about the recognition you received from ABC Open more broadly or people who found your work online, the more general audience or even people in the ABC who've seen it, how important is that recognition to you?

TG: Yeah that's a little bit important, it's just nice to know that you're part of a bigger world, being in a small community if there's someone outside your local community who says yeah, good job, that's nice too. Yeah. That's a little bit important too.

Q: So would you say those three groups are equally important to you?

TG: Yeah definitely, because if it's just your family, that's cool, my family loves me but it might not be any good, you know, whereas if it's just your community it's nice but it's good if you have people outside of your community too, so all of those things are equally important I think.

Some participants downplayed the significance of an audience, although when further questioned revealed that recognition was important to them. For example, HS reported that he did not initially think about an audience when creating his video story:

I like to make stuff, if I think it's worth making I'll make it you know, and it's not with anyone in particular in mind, it's just if I think it's interesting or could be entertaining then something clicks in my mind and I think it'd be an interesting story to tell.

He did not cite recognition as an important factor in his decision to contribute, and was unaware of how many people had seen his work. However, recognition did seem at least somewhat important to him. He described the response to his story from strangers as: "Overwhelming. [The producer] and I may have stumbled across something pretty cool, we may have come up with something pretty interesting, so it felt pretty encouraging."

FG was more cognisant of having an audience, although it was only one factor in his participation:

You know I'd be lying if I said I didn't have...it's nice to have a stroke every now and then...yeah I mean that does matter at some level, but at the same time I'd be taking photos

anyway, I'd be putting photos up on Flickr and Facebook and Twitter and various other things anyway, so yes, how important? At the moment I think I see ABC Open as being important to try and prod me, to develop myself within the areas that I care to develop myself in creatively.

For other contributors, broad recognition was pleasant but not a significant factor in terms of their motivation to contribute. DC was more interested in sharing content with people she knows, specifically family members.

DC: I've had some comments online from people who live elsewhere, which has been nice, I must admit I don't get on the website and go trawling through to see what others have written, cause there's not enough [time] in the day I suppose, and I sit in front of the computer at work so it's not really the first thing I want to do when I come home. But I have noticed it is nice when you read a comment that someone's put on there.

Q: So out of those groups, your friends and your family and people in your local community and people further away, who's the most important in terms of who recognises your work, do you think? Who do you want to see it?

DC: Probably my kids, yeah.

DC's motivation for sharing stories was also highly personal. She felt pleasure re-telling stories that were important to her and learning new ways to tell them, and enjoyed the personal connection with the ABC Open producer:

DC: I suppose when you get older you do like to look back at things that happened to you from the past, like reliving things...I didn't really think about the audience because I was probably telling it to myself. It was just nice talking about it, and because [the producer] is a very gentle person and she is very interested in people and people stories and it was very comfortable just telling her about it, I suppose I was telling her but I think it was mainly for me. Selfish!

Q: What is it about that, that is a rewarding or a nice thing to do?

DC: Because it was something nice for my children. I felt like that was a really good moment in my kids' childhood that they would look back on, and when I sent them a copy of it they

said how lovely it was to hear me talking, and they could tell that I was smiling when I was talking about it, so that was really nice.

OS was also driven by personal goals in terms of creative skills, although she was also conscious of having an audience:

I think I'm writing it for myself, although I'm really happy that other people are reading it, I'm definitely writing so that other people will read it, it's not just for myself, but in the process it's actually more about, have I nailed this for me? When I'm 90 can I go back and look at it and immerse myself in that situation you know?...It lifts your self-esteem for that reason. But I don't think it's in a vanity way, it's just self-affirming in a way, that this is something I can do, yeah.

The data did not present a clear picture about which forms of recognition were most important, however it did reveal that participants did not rate recognition as having the same importance as developing their skills or telling stories that mattered to them.

5.7 Conclusion

The interview data revealed that the motivations for contributing to ABC Open are the same as the intrinsic motivations to act in other areas of life – the desire to satisfy the basic psychological needs to be competent, self-directed and useful. While the way these were expressed varied across participants, these interviews demonstrated that, across the board, participation was highly contingent on at least one of these factors being strongly present, or several being present to a lesser extent.

The extrinsic factor of recognition was not seen by participants as a motivation – it was more of a by-product. This finding supports the assessment that intrinsic factors tend to be more robust (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

These interviews also support Jenkins' assessment of knowledge communities as voluntary, tactical and temporary. The participation of communities in creating content with the ABC can therefore not be thought of as static, but as something fluid and to some degree

tenuous. Consistent patterns of behaviour can not necessarily be relied upon, and participation may wax and wane depending on interest and circumstances.

CHAPTER 6 COMMUNITY

6.1 Introduction

A wide body of research now exists to support the notion of ‘networked individualism’ as a way of situating individuals at the centre of their own networks of relationships, increasingly facilitated by computer mediated-communication.

However, the internet can also be understood as a tool which can facilitate and strengthen traditional notions of community, including geographically-based communities. While computer technologies are often thought of being space collapsing, increasingly the internet is also used to connect locally.

This chapter explores how connection to community offline can affect online interactions, and how online interactions might have an impact offline. The pre-existing social capital of ABC Open contributors may have a role to play in their participation, but there is also some evidence from the data that contributing to ABC Open strengthens relationships and builds a sense of belonging both online and offline.

6.2 Connection to community before participation in ABC Open

The concept of social capital relates to the connections among individuals and the norms of reciprocity and trust that arise from social networks (Putnam, 2000). While various descriptions exist in the literature, Onyx and Bullen (2000) identify several components of social capital which are generally agreed upon, including sociability, reciprocity and trust.

For this research project, pre-existing social capital was explored through a series of questions about the level of recognition participants experienced in their local communities, their level of involvement in local groups, how readily they could access help or help others if needed, and the level of connection each participant felt in relation to the people living in those communities.

All but one participant experienced a high level of recognition in their local area. This level of recognition was most pronounced amongst the three participants living in very remote

areas, including TG who said he was “200%” likely to run into someone he knew walking down the street, and FG who said, “If I walk down the main street I’ll stop and have a chat four or five times in a block.”

High levels of recognition are often associated with small-town life, and in general the smaller the town the higher the chance of meeting people you know on the street. This was supported by the experience of OT, the least connected of the research participants, who lives in the area of highest population, a regional city with a population of over 70,000. OT has lived there all his life (although he has moved from one suburb of the city to another) yet felt only “sort of” connected. This was in sharp contrast to MB who feels “very, very connected” to the people in her local community.

While most participants were involved in some kind of volunteer activity, the women were more likely to be involved in more groups. Three out of the four women were involved in more than four organised groups and are, or have been, organisers of those formal groups. All the women participated in a range of cultural organizations and events, including the local show, the photography group, local radio station, film festival, writers group and church group. Two were instigators of creative collaborations in their towns. BG regularly tried to involve people in ABC Open and other activities, while MB had organised her own workshop and had set up a Facebook group for locals.

HS, the youngest male participant, had organised a local film festival, had volunteered for a local cultural festival, and was involved in a local sporting team. However two other male participants (OT and TG) nominated only one formal group in which they were involved, while FG’s involvement in groups was informal - he helped out at events “from time to time and (I) do other things in an ad hoc way.”

All the participants, by their very involvement in ABC Open, had shown a proclivity for sociability – for being able to access people and resources to help them achieve their goals. So while levels of recognition and local involvement varied greatly, the ability to join in when they wanted to was present for all the participants.

Most of the participants had lived in other places, and for some this meant a relative ease in making new connections. OS moved around a lot as child:

My father was a policeman so we moved town every three years with postings and stuff, and in my adult life I’ve moved a lot, every three years, the longest I’ve ever lived anywhere has

been sort of five years, six years, and I plan to live here forever. I love it, so I'm probably quite different in that respect because I've had to learn to make friends and to say goodbye to friends and to make new friends, to cope with that throughout life, so I would say that my closest friends are here.

This ease in making new connections was also expressed by the two older women, both of whom had had experience working in schools. This experience had given them the skills to meet new people and become involved in community activities, and a high degree of sociability.

Participants generally felt a sense of reciprocity and trust, of being able to call for help and being available to help others, with half the participants having no doubt they could ask for and receive help should they need it. Some were quite adamant in their responses: "Oh absolutely", and "definitely". In terms of reciprocating this help, several participants expressed this as being a normal part of life: "It's part of being in the community" (TG) and "Yes, there's always something going on" (BG). OT was the only participant who was not sure if he could ask for help and who had not recently helped another person.

A sense of connectedness and sociability was experienced as positive, however being well known in a small town can also have negative implications. FG and TG both felt somewhat isolated by their roles and circumstances. Although FG was well known, he was wary of making strong connections:

I'm a business owner in the town, and in some respects, my wife and I run a business together, we step back a little bit because the town can be very cliquey and, if you're involved in one clique, people say well you like *them*, and they won't do things with you and that sort of thing, and it became a bit isolating so for me, so for me, [ABC Open] became a line of getting out there in the community and being involved with things without hopefully causing too many issues for the business I guess.

TG's closest friends were in his local area, yet he felt sometimes misunderstood by other locals: "There are times when I've had a really bad rapport with the community and felt like nobody understood or appreciated me at all."

OS had strong connections to her local community, yet since the birth of her third child had also felt quite isolated. Many of the women she shared time with when her first two children were younger were much less available to spend time with her now:

So while I'm engaged with the community, I found going into that for the third time a socially isolating experience. Plus the women that were previously my very close circle of friends are now all back in full-time employment, so my experience of life is very different to theirs and it's very difficult for them to fit me into their busy schedules now too, that's probably a very key point as to why I'm involved in this project, actually, because it does connect me.

The degree to which pre-existing social capital is a pre-requisite for participation is not entirely clear. Clearly for these participants some degree of sociability is crucial. All of the participants responded to publicity about ABC Open and so clearly had a sense of agency in terms of joining in with new activities and meeting new people.

However the relationship between a higher level of connectedness and a greater level of participation is not clearly evident in these participants. For example, BG has a large number of both strong and weak ties and feels very connected to her community, and is one of the most active contributors to ABC Open. However, DC, who also feels very connected and is very involved in her community, is one of the least active.

Therefore those with the most connections and the greatest sense of belonging to their communities were not necessarily more likely to contribute more regularly to ABC Open. Indeed for some contributors, a sense of isolation was a driving force. FG, TG and OS had all expressed that at times they had felt isolated from their communities. All three had, for a period of time, been among the most consistent contributors to ABC Open.

A more relevant consideration is whether each participant feels a strong sense of purpose in contributing. In general, those with a longer lasting and more diverse presence on ABC Open had described a strong sense of purpose, either to increase their own skills or, in the case of BG, a strong belief in the value of community storytelling. Yet a clear purpose did not always translate to continuing involvement with ABC Open. MB, while clearly interested in presenting outback life to a broad audience, has at the time of writing not contributed to ABC Open for over a year.

6.3 Connection to community after participation in ABC Open

While the data did not present a clear picture regarding the importance of high levels of social capital as a pre-requisite for participation, it did reveal that sociability was increased after participation and that most participants had made new connections locally. The degree of importance of these new connections varied, but all those who had made new connections expressed this as a positive outcome. In some cases participants were very pleased to be able to make these connections, and reported higher levels of connectedness, comfort and self-esteem as a direct result of participating in ABC Open.

For HS, involvement with ABC Open had had a clear and positive outcome:

I've made some really great friends from working with [the producer], and I've met some really great people that I can work with, like collaborators that I can work on projects with and be part of a creative community around [my town]. Because I want to make short films around here and I need actors and technical people, and through [the producer] I've met all these people and, yeah, it feels really good to be part of that community.

FG has made deeper connections with people who he already knew:

FG: Some connections have changed, certainly...you tend to see a lot of people that you might know, in passing, acquaintances or maybe a little bit more. Some of those people are now friends on Facebook through an interest in photography or an interest in video or an interest in something else that ABC Open has helped to foster, I guess, so, yes, certainly I have changed my interactions with people as a result of ABC Open.

Q: So would it be fair to say that ABC open has helped to find people that share the same interests as you?

FG: Yes, definitely.

Whereas FG had previously felt that making connections with people in town might have negative consequences, since meeting people with similar interests he had increased his level of comfort in living in a small town, allowing him to step out of his role as the owner of a local computer service business:

I think it makes a difference, well, for me as a business owner, I guess I'm allowed a level of, you know, this is pleasure. In small towns, you know, I'll go shopping on a Friday night and run into someone who'll say look I'm having trouble with my computer, please help me fix it, in the middle of the supermarket. So look, I mean, that sort of stuff happens, but now it is also possible that instead of it being that sort of interaction, someone I run into will know I was interested in photography and we have our five-minute discussion about what we've been taking photos of lately or something like that. From a personal sanity perspective it's a lot nicer to get away from being the computer guy twenty-four hours a day.

TG also experienced a higher degree of comfort within his local community as a result of ABC Open:

There are some people that contribute regularly, that I already knew in the community, but now I know that they're a part of it, it's just another point of contact with them, or another shared interest I guess. So I'll run into that person and there's other people who've been involved who are good friends or other people I know in the community, and they might not be part of it but it's another thing we share together, yes.

For TG, part of his motivation is to do with learning, part is to do with meeting people, and part is about being part of a community with similar interests. His experience had led him to feel that people knew more about him and "what I do". This had been the most satisfying aspect of his involvement with ABC Open:

Most satisfying? Maybe just the recognition, a general sort of, rather than just your friends on Facebook, a wider audience, getting people outside your normal circle to give you recognition or validation, yeah.

This increase in self-esteem was shared by OS:

OS: Participating in the projects has probably raised my self esteem, just as my painting does in the same way, just as being involved and making a contribution other than mothering my children which is a really important job but is really taken for granted by everybody.

Q: (paraphrased) Is it that the writing is a recognised activity?

OS: Yes, because now what happens, especially because I'll link my ABC Open story to my

Facebook page and my friends have read that, and instead of saying how are the kids, where are the kids, what are the kids doing, how's [my partner's] job they'll actually say 'I read your story and it was fantastic and I remember that and I love the bit...' and it actually opens up a whole other conversation line. And I actually love that, because, as I say, it goes back to the whole whingey mummy blogging, so you know what I mean, it's actually quite different from that and it's actually quite special in that way.

Q: It takes you away from only talking about the kids and people only seeing you in that way?

OS: Exactly, and I've met through the workshops some lovely people. And I think it bridges the gap between generations, too, because I think I was a bit of an ageist, generally didn't talk to people much older than myself, like in their 70s, but through this and hearing their stories that they've read and written and you know that I've read online and when I've seen them at other things, I've got an avenue for actually communicating, and I run into them in town now and they always ask me what I'm writing and what I'm doing and it actually helps me formulate an identity for myself, as well as my painting, that's quite aside from that, I wasn't feeling that great about being a housekeeper.

ABC Open has enabled these participants to move beyond their own networks and create new local connections which they feel have enhanced their lives to some degree. In this sense ABC Open has been an activator of community.

BG had a high degree of interest in local people and their stories, and had met and made connections with others in her local area while looking for subjects for her contributions for ABC Open. In particular, the Portrait Of A Stranger project had led to several new and important connections:

That was really great because that really pushed me to talk to people that I didn't know at all...I approached five or six people locally and asked them could I take a photograph and talk to them, and that was fantastic. I got some good friends out of that...there was one guy who was fascinating, he's a neighbour of my mother, he'd be about 80 I suppose, there's a lot of stories in him, but also there's a woman here on an organic farm, I've got to know her, and a young woman artist who I've got to know very well, yeah, so it was good.

She also described a greater sense of ease with meeting people online. Her blog has received hits and comments from around the world, and had enabled her to have fun and experiment:

It's encouraged me to take things more light-heartedly like, you know, you don't have to have a serious blog, you can do something for fun and I suppose because I've retired recently, I'm more inclined to doing things for fun now.

The results of the interviews demonstrate that, for some people at least, there has been an increase in social capital through richer local conversations and an increase in sociability. A reinvigoration of local networks and communities has been made possible for these participants through the efforts of the ABC to encourage and support online participation.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

This research project has investigated the motivations of those participating in media production through the national public service broadcaster in a time of digital transformation, and the outcomes of this participation.

The impetus for this project was two-fold. As project director of ABC Open I was highly interested in the factors that drive people to contribute and the effects on them of this participation – on what happens once they participate, and whether this leads them to continue to engage and to develop routines of practice. As a researcher in this field, I was drawn to investigate the particularity of the ABC Open contributor's experience, and to explore why people would choose to engage with a national broadcaster when there are so many other options for self-publishing their creative work.

I was also drawn to investigate the local motivations for contributing. ABC Open was framed around notions of the virtual town square, a metaphor which has been used to describe the meeting place for citizens of the nation, rather than a local meeting place. The aims of the ABC as a national public service engaged in participatory media can be read in terms of both needing to stay relevant in a time of rapid technological change and the ongoing need to fulfil the ABC charter, to help build a sense of national identity and to represent the diversity of Australian life. Yet while national identity is important, so too is localism.

ABC Open seeks to create content locally, and to distribute that content locally, nationally and internationally. However, early observations of the project showed a tension between the local and the national/international. Producers argued for more emphasis to be put on the recognition of ABC Open contributors at a local level, the assumption being that local recognition was a strong motivator for contributors. I was therefore interested to find out whether this assumption was correct, and whether local recognition was indeed a primary motivational factor for contributors.

The tension between my two roles as professional and researcher has been a recurring theme over the life of this research project. ABC Open has been rapidly evolving over the last four years, and the pressure on staff – producers, editors, designers, developers and

managers – has at times been intense. I was conscious of not further adding to this pressure by coercing staff, through my position of influence, to operate within any given research framework. Yet throughout this period we have all been learning more about the practices of audience participation, and this research project has been incredibly useful to me in terms of more deeply understanding the nuances of the contributor experience.

To explore the motivations of ABC Open contributors, this research project began by investigating the capacity of citizens to be engaged, both in terms of technical capacity and existing skill levels. The assumption was that a base level of technical skill and connectivity (i.e. access to a reliable internet connection) were pre-requisites. A further area of investigation was whether social connection also played a role, whether off-line connection had a significant role to play in allowing online participation, or as Haythornthwaite and Wellman (2002) argue, that connectivity goes to the already connected, and that greater social benefit from the internet goes to those who are already well situated socially.

The data indicated that while some technical skills, computer network capacity and social connection were present for all participants, and may be pre-requisites for engagement, levels of skill, connectivity and social connection varied and these factors did not play a significant role in determining the type or frequency of contribution. Participants came with a range of skills and online experience. At least one had a very poor internet connection, yet others with a greater level of technical connectivity did not necessarily spend more time online. Levels of sociability also varied. While some participants were highly connected to their local communities, others were not. Of those who were highly connected to their local communities, not all saw this as positive and in some cases their high level of recognition in their community had at times hindered their participation in local community life.

Yet despite these widely varying situations and experiences the data indicated that the capacity to engage, once developed, can be harnessed when it suits the needs of participants. This engagement can occur across platforms, routinely or occasionally. The acquisition of digital literacy is therefore just *part* of a strategy (my emphasis) repositioning the media user from a passive recipient/consumer to an active participant/citizen (Livingstone, van Couvering & Thumim, 2008). Patterns of contribution depended on a range of circumstances, and were, as Jenkins (2006) asserts, voluntary, tactical and temporary.

The motivation for contributing to ABC Open was a key area of investigation in this project. By drawing on self-determination theory I sought to investigate whether the intrinsic motivations to act in other areas of life - the desire to satisfy the basic psychological needs of competency, autonomy and relatedness - were present for the research participants. The data indicated that these factors combine in various ways and to varying degrees for all participants.

The results of my research reveal that the motivations for contributors are primarily personal. All participants reported that they were motivated to participate by a desire to increase their level of skill. This is hardly surprising – ABC Open positions itself as a way to learn and develop digital media skills. Yet participation was also dependent on a sense of autonomy - the capacity to be self-directed and to achieve one's own goals. Several participants spoke of contributing to ABC Open only when it met their needs. They felt no strong sense of responsibility to others to contribute but were instead driven by personal goals. These sentiments are supported by their activity on the site – since the time of interview the routines of practice that were initially developed have been inconsistent. In some cases activity has ceased, yet for at least one contributor it has deepened to include new and more complex forms of production.

While the consistent motivators were competency and autonomy, there were also some participants whose activities clearly related to a sense of purpose, usefulness and relatedness. These goals are less about developing a personal capacity, and more about sharing something with the world, yet they are also intrinsic motivators, fulfilling a need to be of service to others. While not all participants were driven by this goal, two participants were clearly motivated by a desire to tell people more about their world and the world of others in their communities. So while this may not be as strong a driver as the desire to learn and improve skills, it is present in the data and would be worthy of further investigation.

The extrinsic reward of enhanced reputation was also a factor for participants, although they all rated this as less important than other factors. So while most agreed that it was nice to be recognised for their efforts, it was more of a pleasant effect than a key driver. The data did not reveal any pattern regarding the importance of local recognition. Some

participants were more interested in the responses from family and friends; others were pleased when strangers responded, but whether these strangers were local or not was not particularly important.

Recognition and approval by the ABC did add to feelings of competence, with two participants reporting that to be published through the ABC gave them a sense that their work was credible. The reputation of the ABC as a professional and trusted institution is integral to this sense of credibility and legitimacy. Publishing through the ABC validated the emerging identity of these citizens as creative 'prosumers' and authorised their work in the public realm.

What then are the outcomes for the user? One is a sense of increased competence. This outcome was identified by all the participants – they had come to learn a skill and they had achieved this. Yet an important and generally unintended payoff of participation has been the strengthening of the participants' own local networks and communities, through finding like-minded people, and recognizing others and themselves as creative agents within these locations. This has been an important outcome for several participants, increasing their enjoyment and their self-esteem.

While participants did not always set out to be part of something bigger than themselves, most have found themselves engaged in new networks and communities through participating in this online project. They may not have been motivated to participate in order to increase their connectivity locally, but this is a significant outcome of their involvement. For some, this outcome provides a kind of feedback loop which supports their continued engagement. For others, ABC Open has introduced them to like-minded people, increasing feelings of comfort in the community and decreasing feelings of social isolation. Overall most participants found that engagement in participatory practices has enabled them to reinvigorate their local networks, creating richer local conversations and for some participants, resulting in an increase in localized social capital.

For the ABC as a national public service broadcaster, ABC Open provides an avenue to increase the diversity of its representations of Australian life. Contributions from regional Australians have allowed other citizens, both locally and further afield, a chance to further understand regional life in Australia. By bringing these stories together, the ABC is

attempting to engage citizens in national conversations through the town square. Two participants were clearly interested in this outcome, and in representing their lives and the lives of others in their communities to broad audiences outside of their local region. Most participants were also pleased to be recognized and heard by the ABC's audiences and enjoyed receiving comments on the ABC Open website and knowing that their contributions had been appreciated.

The contributions of seven out of the eight research participants have been featured (either before or since the research interview) by ABC Open, either as an Editor's Pick on the ABC Open website, on ABC News 24, in exhibitions or as promotional material. These contributions have encompassed local history and personal perspectives of life in specific regional locations, and have added to a broad collection of stories about people shown to national and, in some cases, international audiences.

Yet the outcomes of participation are not always centralized and often occur in highly individualized and personal ways. ABC Open stories, photographs and videos are created locally, and while some are distributed in traditional ways (e.g. through the broadcast of stories on ABC 1) and through highly centralized methods (e.g. the aggregation of all contributions on the ABC Open website), much of ABC Open's content is distributed through its fluid networks of contributors and viewers who share these stories via social media. In this process, diverse representations of Australian life and national identity are materialized in a decentralized and constantly evolving way.

Whether the intention of participants is personal or communal, participatory culture allows for representations of difference, and for the publication of stories (primarily about people) which may not have been recognized by media professionals as being worthy of coverage. ABC Open brings a varied and diverse collection of experiences together, and serves to legitimise this diversity. While there is potential for this diversity to be increased, ABC Open presents a wider range of perspectives through its broadcast and publication outlets than was previously possible.

National imperatives will remain a feature of the ABC, yet the ABC also acknowledges localism as a strength, and my research indicates that the ABC is a facilitator of local community experiences and relationships. The importance of local ties and the potential

for improved local networks should not be overlooked. The participatory media model of ABC Open has provided new avenues for these networks to develop, increasing the potential for citizens to engage with each other locally and to sustain practices that allow them to more fully represent their lives to the nation.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR ABC OPEN CONTRIBUTORS

Context

These first questions are about how you came to be involved with ABC Open.

How did you come to be involved in ABC Open?

Did you come on your own, or with others?

Did you bring them, or did they bring you?

Did you already have skills in (relevant area...photography, video etc) or resources that you wanted to use?

How would you describe your level of comfort with computers? If I can put it like this, for some people who grew up using computers, who've always had them, you might describe them as digital natives...but for those who didn't have computers at school and who might have started their working lives without computers you'd call them digital immigrants...how would you describe yourself?

Content

This next section is about the contribution you made to ABC Open.

Tell me about the contribution you made.

What form of media was it? What was the subject? How did you decide the subject of your contribution? How did you go about making the contribution? (filming, editing, etc)

These questions are about why you became involved with ABC Open.

What drew you to ABC Open? What made you interested?

What did you think you would experience by being involved?

Pre-existing local connections/Social capital

These next questions are about your local community, who's in it and how you relate to it...

First question is about your family, do they mainly live locally?

And thinking about your closest friends? Do they mainly live within the local community, or at a distance or both?

And of the people you've emailed over the last month, what proportion would you say live locally, and how many live a fair distance away?

And what about social networks...are you on Facebook or anything like that? And how do you use it?

How connected do you feel to your local community...

When you go shopping are you likely to run into a friend or acquaintance?

If you needed help, would you be able to ask someone in your local community to help you?

In the past month, have you helped a neighbour, friend or acquaintance in your local community?

Do you help out a local group as a volunteer? Have you done so in the last six months?
What about in the last month?

Are you an active member of any organized groups? (P&C, industry group, volunteer organization)?

Are you on the management committee of any local group?

Do you feel part of the community in the place where you live?

Motivation

Thinking back to your expectations before you got involved in ABC Open, you mentioned that you thought you would experience XXX

Is that what you did experience?

Who did you make the contribution for? (yourself, or others?)

Who did you hope would see it?

Did you receive recognition or acknowledgement by your immediate circle of family, friends, and acquaintances? (local ABC people, family, friends, broader community?)

In what form?

What did that feel like?

How important was that recognition to you?

Did you receive recognition or acknowledgement by others in the local community who you didn't know?

In what form?

What did that feel like?

How important was that recognition to you?

Did you receive recognition or acknowledgement by anyone outside of your community?
E.g. larger ABC, other contributors, people who found your work online?

What did that feel like? How important was that recognition to you?

How important is it to you that you are publishing your content through the ABC? Does it make any kind of difference to you?

Process

These questions are about how you went about contributing to ABC Open.

I want to ask some questions about the process. How much autonomy did you have in the process?

Did you feel a sense that you could do some or all of the work by yourself, or did you feel reliant on others?

How did that feel?

Did you find it easy, difficult, or somewhere in between? Describe what was easy or difficult/easy about the process?

What did you think about the outcomes at the time? What do you think of the outcomes now?

New connections

These last questions are about the impact participating in ABC Open may or may not have had on you.

Have you made any new connections with people that you think you'll maintain into the future?

Has the process changed the way you interact with others – in the local community? And/or online?

In what way?

Are you likely to continue to create and share stories or other content through ABC Open?

Have you interacted with other contributors online or in person? E.g. have you posted comments to other contributions?

How likely do you think you would be to continue to do this?

Now that you've completed the process, how would you characterize its importance to you?

Has it made a difference to you? Has it changed any aspect of your life (i.e. feel more computer literate, understand online more, feel inspired to keep going)

Has it impacted at all on your local networks or community?

Overall, what was the most satisfying thing about contributing to ABC Open? And what was the least satisfying?

Is there anything you'd like to add that I haven't asked you?

Appendix B

The Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) classifies regions of Australia as RA5 - Very Remote, RA4 - Remote, RA3 - Outer Regional, RA2 - Inner Regional and RA1 - Major City.

Three participants came from locations that are classified as RA5 – Very Remote. Two of these lived in a remote town, A, with a population of less than 5000, while one lived on a property outside of a remote town, B, with a population of less than 5000. A and B are both around 4.5 hours drive to the next largest town, 7.5 hours drive to the coast and 13 hours drive to the state capital city.

Two participants came from towns classified as RA3 – Outer Regional. One lived in the town of C, with a population of over 20,000, a coastal town around 4.5 hours drive from the state capital. The other lived in the town of D, which has a population of less than 5000 and is around 1.5 hours drive from a large town of over 40,000 with a university and active cultural scene.

Two participants lived in towns that are classified as RA2 – Inner Regional. One was from the large town of E with a population of over 30,000, which is home to a university and has a relatively young population. The other was from the small town of F, which is 50 minutes drive from a large service town, and around 1 hour to a major regional city.

One participant came from a large regional city with an RA1 – Major City classification.

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