



# *Debating NBN policy – the influence of issue management*

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*“The NBN project needs, more than anything, an end to  
spin.”*

Minister for Communications, the Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, 12 December 2013

## 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.*

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*During the course of the PhD enrolment I have not been a member of any political organisation.*

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## Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES.....	8
LIST OF FIGURES.....	9
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	10
ABSTRACT.....	13
1. INTRODUCTION .....	15
2. DEFINITIONS.....	17
2.1 “Issue” .....	17
2.2 “Issue management” .....	22
2.2.1 Corporate policy .....	33
2.3 IM practices .....	35
3. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	37
3.1 The phenomenon being studied .....	37
3.1.1 Reputation management.....	40
3.1.2 Legitimacy gap theory .....	42
3.2 Public affairs .....	44
3.3 Broadband policy.....	46
3.3.1 Using evidence.....	51
3.4 The gap in knowledge.....	53
4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	55
4.1 The public sphere .....	56
4.1.1 PR influence on the media.....	65
4.2 Analytical lenses .....	68
5. RESEARCH APPROACH, METHODOLOGY AND METHODS .....	74
5.1 Research questions .....	74
5.2 Approach .....	75
5.3 Methodology .....	78
5.3.1 Case study.....	79
5.3.2 The NBN .....	82
5.4 Methods .....	83
5.4.1 In-depth interviews.....	84
5.4.2 Textual analysis.....	86
5.5 Sampling .....	88
5.5.1 Issue selection.....	90
5.5.2 Interviewee selection .....	94
5.6 Data coding and analysis .....	97

5.7 Trustworthiness.....	101
5.8 Ethics .....	104
6. FINDINGS – IM PRACTICES .....	105
6.1 Message strategy .....	110
7. FINDINGS – INFLUENCE OF IM ON KEY ISSUES .....	112
7.1 Cost.....	113
7.1.1 Cost-benefit analysis.....	114
7.2 Building the NBN .....	129
7.2.1 Asbestos.....	132
7.2.2 Delay .....	136
7.2.3 Choice of technology .....	139
7.2.4 Aerial deployment .....	142
7.2.5 Opt-out, deferral, disconnection .....	143
7.2.6 Battery backup.....	147
7.2.7 Quigley and Costa Rica .....	152
7.3 Security.....	153
7.3.1 Huawei .....	153
7.4 Digital divide.....	160
7.4.1 Country vs city .....	167
7.4.2 Tenant consent .....	170
7.5 Regulatory settings.....	171
7.5.1 Structural separation .....	171
7.5.2 Special Access Undertaking .....	178
7.5.3 Pricing .....	182
7.5.4 Competition protection .....	183
7.5.5 Black spots .....	186
7.5.6 Quality of Service .....	188
7.7 Content.....	190
7.7.1 Copyright .....	191
7.7.2 Applications .....	198
7.7.3 Teleworking .....	200
8. DISCUSSION.....	202
8.1 Chains of influence .....	204
8.2 Assessing IM theory.....	210
8.2.1 Measurement .....	217
8.2.2 Best practice .....	219

8.3 Implications .....	236
8.3.1 The public sphere and democracy.....	236
8.3.2 Practitioners.....	250
9. CONCLUSIONS .....	256
9.1 Original contribution .....	257
9.2 Limitations .....	262
9.3 Further research.....	264
APPENDIX 1 – IM case study comparisons .....	273
APPENDIX 2 – Definitions summary.....	277
APPENDIX 3 – Issue lifecycle comparisons .....	278
APPENDIX 4 – Crisis and risk management.....	279
APPENDIX 5 – Issue response models.....	284
APPENDIX 6 – IM process flow.....	285
APPENDIX 7 – IM practice taxonomy.....	286
APPENDIX 8 – Coding rules .....	287
APPENDIX 9 – Corporate communications .....	290
APPENDIX 10 – Agenda setting, priming and framing.....	292
APPENDIX 11 – Establishing trustworthiness .....	297
APPENDIX 12 – Issue salience data .....	301
APPENDIX 13 – Baseline interview questions.....	304
APPENDIX 14 – Interviewee list .....	305
APPENDIX 15 – IBES results .....	306
APPENDIX 16 – All issues list.....	307
APPENDIX 17 – Issue selection background .....	310
APPENDIX 18 – Issue polarity and perspectives .....	314
APPENDIX 19 – Interviewee sampling parameters.....	322
APPENDIX 20 – Issues and influences matrix.....	323
APPENDIX 21 – Practices and influences matrix.....	324
APPENDIX 22 – All IM practices .....	328
APPENDIX 23 – Social media IM .....	330
APPENDIX 24 – Stakeholder analysis approaches .....	337
APPENDIX 25 – Government cf. corporate IM.....	342
APPENDIX 26 – IMC best practice indicators .....	344
APPENDIX 27 – Issue prioritisation model.....	347
REFERENCES .....	348

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Issues selected	Page 90
Table 2	IM planning grid	224
Table 3	Summary of findings	258
Table A1	Modified Hallahan model	275
Table A2	Matrix code, near content with overlapping proximity	325
Table A3	Matrix code, near content within 40 word proximity	326
Table A4	Matrix code, near content within 80 word proximity	327
Table A5	Electronic & mobile PR	330



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Hainsworth & Meng issue lifecycle	Page 20
Figure 2	Palese & Crane issue lifecycle	22
Figure 3	Jaques issue lifecycle	22
Figure 4	Davis Policy Cycle	30
Figure 5	Common steps in the IM process	32
Figure 6	Generic issue management system	34
Figure 7	Gap analysis	43
Figure 8	Theoretical framework	55
Figure 9	PR content in newspapers	66
Figure 10	Common IM practices	106
Figure 11	Chains of influence	205
Figure 12	Do-It Plan IM model	231
Figure 13	IM process inputs & outputs	232
Figure 14	Activist issue redefinition grid	240
Figure A1	Issue & crisis relational model	280
Figure A2	Tweet from Malcolm Turnbull	331
Figure A3	Malcolm Turnbull's website	331
Figure A4	Application of SIM to social media	333
Figure A5	The corporation & its stakeholders	337
Figure A6	Economic stakeholders in the sociopolitical environment	338
Figure A7	Mitchell et al. stakeholder model	339

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACCAN	Australian Communications Consumer Action Network
ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
ACIG	Australian Content Industry Group
ACIJ	Australian Centre for Independent Journalism
ACMA	Australian Communication and Media Authority
AFACT	Australian Federation Against Copyright Theft
<i>AFR</i>	<i>The Australian Financial Review</i>
AGD	Attorney-General's Department
AGM	Area General Manager
ALP	Australian Labor Party
Anon	Anonymous
APH	Australian Parliament House
APRA AMCOS	Australasian Performing Rights Association, Australasian Mechanical Copyright Owners' Society
ARIA	Australian Recording Industry Association
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
ATO	Australian Taxation Office
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
BPI	Best Practice Indicator
CBA	Cost-Benefit Analysis
CCC	Competitive Carriers Coalition
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEPU	Communication Electrical Plumbing Union
CFA	Country Fire Authority (Victoria)
C-level	Corporate/Executive level within an organisation
CM	Crisis Management
Comms	Communications
Comms Alliance	Communications Alliance
<i>CommsDay</i>	<i>Communications Day</i>
CSG	Customer Service Guarantee
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CWU	Communications Workers Union
DBCDE	Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
DCD	Disconnection Date
DEAN	Data, Evidence and Analysis Network (NSW)
DoC	Department of Communications
DSLAM	Digital Subscriber Line Access Multiplexer
EBP	Evidence-based policymaking

EDM	Electronic Direct Mail
EFA	Electronic Frontiers Australia
<i>Fin Review</i>	<i>The Australian Financial Review</i>
FSLAM	Fibre Subscriber Line Access Multiplexer
FTTB	Fibre-to-the-building
FTTN	Fibre-to-the-node
FTTP	Fibre-to-the-premises
GRS	Graduate Research School
HFC	High frequency cable
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
HSB	High Speed Broadband
IABC	International Association of Business Communicators
IAP	Issue Action Publications
IBES	Institute for a Broadband-Enabled Society (changed to MNSI)
ICCO	International Communications Consultancy Organisation
ICT	Information & Communication Technology
IIA	Internet Industry Association
IM	Issue Management
IMC	Issue Management Council (US)
IMT	Issue Management Team
IPTV	Internet Protocol Television
ISO	International Organisation for Standardisation
ISP	Internet Service Provider
ITS	International Telecommunications Society
Journo	Journalist
LIFD	<i>Telecommunications (Low-Impact Facilities) Determination 1997 (Commonwealth)</i>
Mbps	Megabits per second
MNSI	Melbourne Networked Society Institute
MRA	Music Rights Australia
MTM	Multi-Technology Mix
NBN	National Broadband Network (referring to the infrastructure)
nbn	National Broadband Network Company Limited (trading as “nbn”, referring to the company itself)
NBN Co	Previous trading name of nbn
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSA	National Security Agency
NSW	New South Wales (in Australia)
NZ	New Zealand
OAIC	Office of the Australian Information Commission
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
op-ed	Opinion-editorial

OTT	Over The Top
PAC	Public Affairs Council
PoI	Point of Interconnect
PLA	People's Liberation Army (of China)
PM&C	Prime Minister & Cabinet
PR	Public Relations
PRIA	Public Relations Institute of Australia
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
QoS	Quality of Service
RDA	Regional Development Area
RM	Risk Management
RMCP	Regional Mobile Communications Project
RQ	Research Question
RSP	Retail Service Provider
SAU	Special Access Undertaking
SIM	Strategic Issue Management
SIMS	Strategic Issue Management System
SME	Subject Matter Expert
<i>SMH</i>	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>
SSU	Structural Separation Undertaking
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
Telco	Telecommunications
USO	Universal Services Obligation
UTS	University of Technology, Sydney

## ABSTRACT

Many writers have discussed the merits of evidence-based policy and the deliberative public sphere in which “rational critical debate” determines government policies and decisions. Citizens expect governments to deliver policies that lead to beneficial outcomes for society – not just special interests.

However, media reporting about a proposal or issue and representations by special interests – often referred to as lobbying – can affect policy development and political decision-making; and this was demonstrated in interview data for this study.

The practice of “issue management” (IM) involves PR and specialist public affairs practitioners employing practices to “manage” issues “behind the scenes” and/or in the media, for example, using agenda setting, priming and framing. Yet there has been limited study of these invisible forces and their influence on public debate and related policy outcomes.

This study used in-depth interviews to examine the practice of IM in PR and public affairs, in the context of a case study – the National Broadband Network (NBN). It largely confirms existing IM theory, and its applicability in a public policy context, finding that IM is practised across roles and levels within organisations involved in the debate. IM was seen to directly influence policies, including the underlying NBN policy initiative, and the move to a “must-opt” position on battery backup. Policy practitioners were able to use IM to place policy ideas on the public agenda and to create the necessary conditions for policy change.

The study expands on existing public sphere theory, by tracing the impact of IM on public debate, society and democracy – within the bounds of the NBN case study – finding that the influence of IM is likely to be more far-reaching than has hitherto been acknowledged.

Data analysis revealed that making submissions, utilising research, providing information and conducting in-person meetings were common IM practices employed by issue managers in the NBN debate. Analysis revealed that providing one-to-one briefings and making submissions were both effective in influencing policy processes – and in the case

of submissions, this also held true for organisations that were otherwise outliers on the data.

This study assesses IM lifecycle and practice models in light of the findings, expands on existing theory of IM practice, and considers the application of these models in an Australian public policy context. The profile of the NBN, and the breadth of public policy issues it involves, also means the study has transferability to other cases in a similar context.