

## Between exacerbation and alleviation? Media in transition, social transformation and inclusiveness

### ABSTRACT

Problems of social transformation and inclusiveness are not just social problems, they are also media communication problems; and they are not just South African problems they are internationally shared. The same widening gap between rich and poor, the uneven and often skewed benefits of globalisation, and political disruption all sit alongside and intersect with a changing communication environment. While both our media content and our ways of paying for media are stable, the ends they serve and the communication instruments to which they are attached are mutating. In an era of connectivity, both social media and new content priorities are recalibrating our understanding of media, producing both new uses for media and new regimes of knowledge about media alike. Assessing the social and political significance of these changes becomes all the more urgent when we consider that social transformation and inclusiveness will increasingly need to work through these new communication settings.

### INTRODUCTION

Achieving social transformation and inclusion in communications is not just a South African problem. It is widely shared. The South African sense of its difference and particularity is so visible and visceral – and the issues needing to be addressed so insistent – that it is easy to lose sight of the ways in which South African and Southern African problems have parallels with those of other peoples and places in this the second decade of the 21st century. Certainly, some of the particulars are tenaciously national. In the university sector there were the student protest movements through 2016, with attendant university closures, vandalism of facilities, “Rhodes must fall” activism, and moves to decolonise the curriculum – all staged as significant public, national media and social media events. There was also the economic and political turbulence associated with continuing inequality, tensions and sometimes chaos within the governing party, leading to a change in Presidents, collisions between politicians and the judiciary and the public service.

Yet for all of these local instantiations, issues such as the cost, relevance and fitness for purpose of higher education, rising inequality, political and economic disruption, traditional and new media platforms entering into new relations with each other, are shared internationally. In each case the traditional media and social media have been entering into new unstable configurations as players

in these events. Long-standing political settlements in many countries are up for grabs as social media has set about transforming the mediatising of social issues and political communication, generating fears for the economic and social consequences of this combustible mix.

In these circumstances it may be useful to step back to consider some of the points of continuity as well as the disjunctions they cover – if only to better sharpen up a sense of local particularity. Doing so is not to devalue the urgent necessity of a sustained and imaginative attention to South African and Southern African affairs. Nor is it to diminish the need to re-calibrate educational, communication, media, journalism, and cultural, social and political settlements in South Africa. It is rather to acknowledge the extent to which South African developments mirror their international counterparts in the global re-calibration of communication and media and of cultural and social settlements.

We are then not just seeing South African-specific problems but also a national inflection of a common set of problems and issues confronting government and peoples around the world. Acknowledging this might make these problems, and solutions for them, not only shareable but connected up in ways that the national frame does not always readily disclose. Here I will thread some South African-specific interests into a more general discussion of communications, and more particularly, the media.

## **1. GLOBALISATION, INEQUALITY AND MEDIA CHANGE**

After nearly twenty-five years of post-apartheid rule, inequality in South Africa is persistent. Unemployment is high at 26.7% (Moya, 2018) while averaging 23.7% between 1995 and 2016 (Bhorat et al., 2016:2). Creating a more equal South Africa has been difficult but there has been a “moderate reduction in ‘extreme poverty’” (Bhorat et al., 2016:1). The task of addressing inequality over this period has been made more difficult by global trends towards inequality amidst significant social and market transformations. The strain on social inclusion outcomes and cohesion is evident globally. The widening gap between rich and poor is well documented (see Credit Suisse’s Research Institute’s *Global Wealth Report 2017*; McGuinness [2018] *Briefing paper income inequality in the UK*; and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) *In it together: Why less inequality benefits all* [2015]). Together they build a picture of a widening income gap with a “rising distance of the lower 40% from the rest of society” (OECD, 2015:59). This was a divide both within as well as between countries. Global growth had helped those in higher income groups while leaving behind those on lower incomes. The OECD was not only concerned for the social and political issues this raised but also for their economic consequences. It pointed to labour market changes with the rise in what it called non-standard work and attendant “job polarisation”, to persistent gender disparities, and to the challenges associated with such concentrations of wealth. It canvassed redistribution policies to address these disparities.

This was decidedly not just a divide between the developed and developing worlds; it was a divide within each. The first world was in the second and third worlds, and the third world was decidedly

in the first world. South Africa's inflection of these inequalities is obviously informed by its history of apartheid and its post-apartheid settlements. The situation in many OECD countries starting from a more equal income base has been one of worsening inequality, while in South Africa it has been a continuous history of social inequality. Sometimes – and this is also a global problem – the intensely national character of the conversation about inequality can crowd out the recognition of these global trends and their structural origins and consequences.

Globally we can observe the same pressures to convert full-time jobs to part-time, precarious and contract-based employment. As part of these employment changes we are seeing the extension of portfolio careers beyond the creative sector, as precarious labour conditions see ever more workers exposed more directly to global markets and shifts in the global economy with all the opportunities and risks this entails. It is promoted positively as the “gig economy”, enabling the workplace version of the online world's “anywhere, anytime and on any device” – where workers are able to work flexibly, when they want, where they want and how they want. However, as has become all too evident from high-profile cases over Uber contracts in UK and South Africa (Riley, 2017), this aspect of the gig economy has evident downsides, offering as it does means for employers to avoid giving their workers the protection of employment legislation and minimum basic benefits, including superannuation.

At the same time, as South African experience also exemplifies the combination of technology and high-speed internet access that can create employment opportunities for globally dispersed workers and firms enabling them to participate from their South African base in global production networks (Ryan, 2016).

We see a parallel contracting out of services and operations, leading to shifts in the balance between capital, labour and government. As governmental operations are increasingly contracted out to the private sector, the longstanding practice of not disclosing the terms of contracts owing to their being “commercial-in-confidence,” is leading to a loss of transparency and accountability in governmental operations. South Africa's uneven experience of procurement, while taking on its own particularities as persistent allegations of widespread political corruption in tendering processes attest (see, for instance, Auchard & Brock, 2017; Makhafol, 2018), speaks also to a now global story of private gain at the public's expense.

The digital divide, for its part, is not just a generalised divide over a population's access to digital resources sharing similar contours to broader issues of inequality such as social class. It is also a divide expressed geographically within cities, between cities, and between cities and regions. Globally, it is creating geographies of advantage and disadvantage evident in differential access to user pay services, broadband rollout, and communication blackspots and news deserts. Yes, the extraordinary uptake of cheap mobile phones is providing an unprecedented number of people with internet access globally. Indeed in many places across the world Facebook and WeChat are providing people's first and only experience of the internet and social media. Facebook is sometimes confused in Myanmar, for instance, “for the internet itself”. While in South Africa the stripped-down version of Facebook, Facebook Lite, is enabling the platform to spread “through

South Africa's entire population" with Facebook usage sitting at 29% of the population in 2018 (Patricios & Goldstuck, 2018). But this uptake of the mobile internet raises the prospect of new kinds of communication inequalities anchored in the limitations of mobile access in an emerging market like South Africa's. Napoli and Obar (2014), for instance, see the mobile phone as creating "a mobile internet underclass". At the same time the increasingly central role being played by social media platforms in communication – both media and non-media alike – is providing these platforms with unprecedented market power.

The past twenty-five years have been marked by an ever deeper globalisation of production networks and supply chains of manufacturing, media and services. Our production networks are now so integrated that many of the things we use in our daily lives have a decidedly and increasingly complex geography in each of their production, distribution and consumption dimensions (Dicken, 2007:4). Their scale has become that much more far-reaching just as their "choreography has become increasingly intricate" (Dicken, 2007:4). Consequently, the things we use in our everyday life now have such complex geographies as their component parts are produced in different places and then assembled elsewhere. This process is very much in evidence in car assembly and manufacturing in BMW's South African Group Plant in Rosslyn, serving as it does export markets in Asia, Australasia, North America and Africa (BMW, 2018). So transnational have these production networks become that labels of origin "rarely have meaning any more" (Dicken, 2007:4).

When I flew from Australia to South Africa to attend the 2016 SA Communication Association (SACOMM) conference, I was flying on one of South African Airlines' most successful routes: that between Johannesburg and Perth. There were no empty seats. This was no surprise. In terms of those cities through which mining and mining services are organised globally, these cities are two nodal points. By 2010, Australian mining journalists were reporting the complementary character of the Australian-African relationship in mining mediated through South Africa (Piper, 2010:19). Australian companies operating in Africa were choosing Australian and South African stock exchange listings, while African companies were sometimes choosing the Australian exchange as their "primary exchange" to secure the investment and liquidity they needed (Piper, 2010:19). This was a decidedly multi-sided relationship. In South Africa, as in Australia, mining generates a significant proportion of both countries' foreign exchange earnings and figures largely in each country's stock market capitalisation and number of listed companies (on South Africa, see Bhorat et al., 2016; on Australia, see Office of the Chief Economist, 2016).

The two people I was next to while waiting to be processed through customs and immigration were, respectively, a financial advisor whose business footprint straddled South Africa and Australia and an Australian mining engineer visiting the Namibian operations of a South African mining company. The financial adviser had moved his base to Australia and was combining a family visit and meetings with his South African clients; for his part the mining engineer was in South Africa to learn from his South African counterparts their advanced and new processing techniques (he told me these techniques were more advanced than those in operation in Australia). For my part I was returning to South Africa, drawn here through international networks developed by South African

scholars. Whether it is business production networks or academic networks, we are living as Peter Dicken suggests within globalising networks. Underscoring this globalising point, popular myth has it that Perth, the closest part of Australia to South Africa, houses the largest proportion of expatriate South Africans of any Australian city. This is not the case. That distinction goes to Australia's largest and most global city, Sydney (Forrest et al., 2013:58) which hosts twice the number of South Africans as do either Perth or Melbourne.

We also see globally the same problem of coping with the uneven and often skewed benefits of this globalisation. The economic losers of globalisation underwrote populist politics and protest movements such as Britain's Brexit vote and Donald Trump's successful campaign for President. Both rode on broad voter disenchantment with professional politicians, with levels of immigration and a jobless US economic recovery. We now recognise the importance of social media platforms to each of these convulsions, and the media campaigns conducted through them, including by newly emergent political campaigning consultancies providing political services on a global scale. In Cambridge Analytica's case, this was Africa, Europe and North America (Channel 4, 2018). While South Africa's experience of social media has generally cast it as an agent for speaking truth to power, these examples point to the ways that these channels can be professionally organised and manipulated by entities from foreign governments to transnational political consultancies such as Bell Pottinger (Segal 2018).

Processes of globalisation operating within national settings are being used by multinational corporations and sometimes governments to reorient their domestic policy settings towards global agendas and systems (Sassen, 2006:1-5). This is evident in everything from the South African government's matching of tax concessions available for international film production to secure major feature film shoots and postproduction for South Africa, to the ways that a handful of global companies have come to dominate legal, accounting, advertising, and social media and market research. In the case of technology companies like Apple, they have arbitrated these national settings to transfer tax liabilities from one jurisdiction to another low tax jurisdiction, thereby enabling them to build their international networks and secure advantages over their competitors.

Whether you are in South Africa or elsewhere, we all face the same digital disruptions which are facilitating this globalisation from within. The basic equations of transport (Uber), telecommunications (skype, messenger, facetime), advertising and marketing (Facebook, Instagram), and media content provision (YouTube, Google and Apple Play, Netflix, Amazon) are changing, presaging new forms of business organisation. We see the same flattening of business hierarchies and business processes, eliminating middle layers in distribution whether in retailing, distributing or producing media. In these new arrangements various occupations are disappearing, along with the mid-level staff of businesses.

At the same time, these new communications environments also allow social mobilisation and activism. They have been credited with leavening state power in important ways in both South Africa and Africa more generally (Gumede, 2016). The South African student activism of 2016, for instance, was loosely coordinated on a national scale through social media. But social media's

capacity for social mobilisation and activism has equally been in evidence in its facilitation of intercommunal violence, hate speech and the spread of misinformation through its networks. In March 2018 *The New York Times* was reporting that Facebook was being blamed for increasing ethnic tensions and violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar (Goel, Kumar & Frenkel, 2018). This capacity for misinformation and harm has led to well-argued calls for the regulation of social media in the public interest (Napoli, 2015) and a scramble on the part of social media providers to better regulate their networks in the public interest.

Political divisions, media fragmentation and the development of word-of-mouth amplifying itself to broadcast scale through social media have been the subject of communication conferences around the world, not just those of SACOMM. The same tendencies towards echo chambers and polarisation have been observed. As people are increasingly getting information through social media rather than traditional media outlets, we are not only seeing the confirmation of pre-existing opinions (the well-known phenomenon of “confirmation bias”) but their significant extension and amplification. With social media platforms driving processes of selective media consumption through their algorithms, alternative viewpoints are being filtered out, leading to increasing polarisation. Such developments are concerning. Reporting the results of a number of studies, Cass Sunstein (2009:4) observes how “enclaves of like-minded people” can be “the breeding ground for extreme movements” such that when they talk to each other they tend to develop more extreme views than they had previously expressed. Sunstein then goes on to note that much good can and has come out of just such enclave deliberation and group polarisation. By extending the scope and scale of interpersonal communication, social media has both facilitated connection among people and facilitated activism, sharpening divisions of various kinds. The advantages and risks associated with this double movement were well expressed in South Africa’s #feesmustfall activism. Enclave deliberation dynamics are thus powerful vehicles for both social inclusion and exclusion alike.

## **2. MEDIA CONTENT AND MARKETS**

Our rapidly changing communications environment is radically changing its settings, with significant consequences for social inclusion and positive transformation, social exclusion and dislocation alike. Exploring the social and political consequences of these changes requires recognising a fundamental paradox – namely, that so many of the general features remain the same; but the ends and instruments to which they are attached are being transformed.

Our basic forms of paying for media communications are relatively stable. Media providers still monetise audience attention through: bundling up audiences to sell to advertisers; through selling media content directly to their audiences; through a combination of both advertiser and user support; and through public funding, governmental and otherwise (often combined with advertising support). Media of all stripes are still shaped by market information and user recommendation regimes connecting media providers with media users (Webster, 2016:17-18). Much of what are carried in media platforms are persistent genres and vehicles like news, presenters, documentary, TV drama, and sport.

Advertiser-supported media still, therefore, sustain audience markets. Consumers still pay for media underwriting content markets. Hybrids of audience and content markets still deliver diverse sorts of media. Considerations of public good, whether governmental or philanthropic, remain an important means to deliver what commercial dynamics cannot or will not deliver – with media including the social media platforms still retaining some sense of operating under a social license. Audience measurement and market research are still based on conventions, with knowledge of these still being monetised. In many areas, policy and regulation are still defining the rules of the game for media companies (although not always the same policies and regulations). Production networks are still being formed to create new works. And, media is still being produced in places and spaces of production.

But in an era of connectivity, these basic forms are mutating, sometimes beyond recognition. They are now attached to quite different media, with quite different business models, different priorities and ends. We are seeing the reinvention of advertiser-supported media, as online media (principally social media of the Facebook and Google variety) have in a short period of time eclipsed print advertising media expenditure in many countries, sending newspapers and magazines into crisis. In Australia, for instance, the print share of total national advertising expenditure declined from 46% in 2009 to 13% in 2016; while online rose from 15% to 48% in the same period (Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, 2018:17). The contrast with South Africa is striking. In that same year, based on Statista (2018) figures, South African television advertising was dominant, accounting for 42% of national advertising expenditure, the print (newspaper and magazine) share stood at 24% and online advertising was 11% – the same as radio and fractionally more than outside-the-home advertising. However the South African online share of advertising expenditure in 2016 was well below the global online expenditure, estimated at 27% (Mint, 2016), suggesting the scope for considerable disruption to South Africa's media system over the next few years (Marshal, 2017).

With shifts in expenditure globally towards online, the nature of advertising is changing and with it advertiser-supported media. Audience markets are being re-shaped, as social media and search platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Google, and WeChat come to dominate advertiser-supported media globally, creating in the process an increasing commercialisation of speech while promoting, in Just and Latzer's (2017, 238) words, increased "individualization, inequalities, and deterritorialization", which are decreasing "transparency, controllability, and predictability" in advertiser-supported media.

In this era of connectivity, content markets are also being reinvented. We are seeing the exploration of different ways of bundling content into streaming and pay-TV services, which are reducing service costs to consumers while redefining the scope and parameters of subscription operations, providing new terms for the intersection of local and international programming. New global digital players are each involved in innovating these services internationally, unsettling previous national market settings in radio and music retail. In music streaming services, both Google Play and Apple Play entered the South African market in 2015, three years after the German music streaming services Simfy and Deezer did. For its part, Tencent, closely linked as it



is with South Africa's media giant Naspers (Africa's largest company by market capitalisation, see Cotterill & Lucas, 2018), entered the market with Joox in 2017, claiming it was prioritising "local music tailored for the South African market" (Smith, 2017). In each case, these South African roll-outs were part of larger global roll-outs. A similar pattern can be observed with the subscription video-on-demand rollout of Netflix in South Africa in 2016.

A characteristic of both these music and video-on-demand services is the central role algorithmic selection plays in tracking, predicting and recommending audience selection of programming. Such user recommendation systems are also a characteristic and significant market advantage for online retailers. Amazon, which has had a South African presence since 2006, is expanding its South African operations from its Cape Town base into more extensive purpose-built facilities (BusinessTech, 2017a), providing increased competition for South African online retail provider, Takealot (BusinessTech, 2017b). These online media platforms are not only operating across audience and content markets in media but share a focus on extracting and using data that can be seen across the economy, giving rise to the notion of "platform capitalism" (Srnicek, 2017:36-92). Such developments pose particular challenges to national media settings, by ceding significant market control to multinational platform providers.

Alongside these structural shifts is the re-envisaging of our public interest media with, for instance, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) (Taylor, 2016) signaling moves away from radio broadcasting towards mobile online media as a means of maintaining their relevance and value but raising in the process access and equity issues. While broadcasting through the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) is likely to remain central for considerably longer in South Africa than in Canada, the loss of commercially valuable audiences to mobile media platforms will progressively undermine the financial base and governmental support for public media, leading to diminishing capacity and standards on the SABC's part. This creates prospects of a poor person's public media alongside a commercial media system whose extent of access is defined by capacity to pay (Duncan, 2017a:612). The extent to which the SABC can mitigate these developments by following the CBC in migrating services online and to mobile is limited by South Africa's compelling access and equity concerns.

Our markets for knowledge of audiences and media users are also being transformed. This is producing new kinds of knowledge about and uses for the media which are increasingly challenging earlier ones. We are seeing the partial collapsing of the distinction between audience research and service marketing; and between the service provider and the independent research provider. The settlements of the analogue era – the structural separation of market research services from media companies, the social survey privacy settings of bespoke audience and consumer research, and the hard separations between audience research and advertising/marketing/sales – are each being partially dismantled under the impact of digital analytics. Media platforms such as Google, Facebook and Amazon are transforming each of these established settings. Audience research and service marketing are being brought together, connected by algorithms. Market information provision and media provision are increasingly one and the same. The collecting, analysis of information and the acting upon that information are now undertaken



together. This messes up the established distinctions between independent market research and the uses made of that research.

At the same time, new uses are being found for audience data beyond media buying and selling. Consisting as it does of extensive user profiles across a significant number of touch-points, this audience data becomes valuable in its own right. The platform media combine the media functions that once comprised separate media organisations, market research organisations reporting on media audiences, and media planning and buying agencies. Furthermore, platforms are not limited to media: they have also become data providers supplementing and supplanting the work of other providers. This data collection even includes the “sensory” – in the sense of the use of sensors in a variety of devices – to provide data about you from, for instance, your home and car (Andrejevic & Burdon, 2015:19).

Advertising is being reformulated in this process of datafication. Take an Australian example. For thirty years, Harold Mitchell and Associates dominated the Australian media planning and buying landscape with a focus upon integrating media campaigns across media forms. Mitchell's company artfully managed a media planning mix across outdoor, radio, television, newspapers and magazines and the internet before the advent of platform media. Today Carat, a division of the Japanese global advertising conglomerate Dentsu, has eclipsed Mitchell and Associates. Carat, which also has a dominant position in the South African advertising market (MarketLine, 2017), pursues a different model than did Harold Mitchell. Carat in Australia starts with digital advertising, and that means social media and search – Facebook and Google-related companies. From there it reaches out to other platforms. The traditional media is not the anchor for marketing campaigns: it is the equation of online and mobile devices. This is requiring the exercise of a different expertise on the part of advertiser and advertising agency alike. This involves not so much the intricacies of the traditional media and the circulation audits and ratings data that underpinned media planning and buying in these media – although these traditional market information regimes still remain in place for these media – but it requires a mastery of “media analytics” – which is a different task. This now requires an understanding of the world of social media sites, real-time ad exchanges, online analytics and ad targeting systems – as Joe Caserta writing in *Wired* (2013) put it, these new conditions require data scientists like himself rather than the business analysts of yesteryear.

Sven Brodmerkel and Nic Carah (2016:ix) see this turn to digital analytics as ushering “in a computational approach to advertising”. Such an approach gives media organisations the capacity to both qualify their audiences in “ever more specific and fine-grained ways” and to select and deliver content to these audiences based on these audience profiles. For their part, the advertisers are engaged in a different critical task. They need to turn “the creative capacities of audiences” towards advertisers' ends by inserting themselves into user activity in audience Instagram uploads, Facebook and You-Tube activity. When it works successfully, these audiences now distribute and sell brand messages through their sharing and co-creating of content. It is the users now that enable the brands to “embed themselves more deeply into the lived cultural practices of consumers and their (online) network of friends” (Brodmerkel & Carah, 2016:xi). Those media forms which enable this sort of interpersonal work have a considerable market

advantage over traditional commercial media that display advertising adjacent to content or interrupt content flow with radio or TV advertisements.

Alongside these advertising and advertiser-supported media developments there has been an ongoing and further rejigging of the performance of creativity in production networks that enacts for film and television the global production systems identified earlier by Dicken (2007). The globally dispersed systems of production in manufacturing have their counterparts in film production. There they support high budget Hollywood and some European production in places like Cape Town, Sydney, Vancouver, Prague and Louisiana, all featuring in production networks in ways they never did before (Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2005; Wasko & Erickson, 2008). Various visual effects and postproduction houses in Wellington in New Zealand can now provide specialised services to global clients. Increasingly global "super" production companies now provide "local programming" across a large number of national television markets. For instance, the major producer of the Australian public broadcaster's (the ABC) television drama output is Matchbox Pictures – a wholly-owned subsidiary of an American company NBC International (O'Regan & Potter, 2013:11-12).

Alongside and supporting these changes is the refashioning of the places of media production and distribution. The rise and rise of contracting-out dynamics coupled with the increasing importance of project-based work is creating dense agglomerations of production in media cities (see Elmer & Gasher, 2005; Doyle, 2016). This is further elevating these cities' status, contributing to their national and regional leadership in media. Cape Town and Johannesburg in South Africa have this leadership role; likewise Sydney in Australia (O'Regan, Goldsmith & Ward, 2011), London and Paris in the UK and France respectively, and Los Angeles and New York in the USA. The last decade has seen both the reaffirmation of these cities as media capitals and the emergence of new media capitals alongside these (Curtin, 2003). The reworking of both Cape Town and Johannesburg's place in international production networks is physically evident in the industry clustering in those cities (see Visser, 2014).

In each of these "drivers" of media change there is a mix of elements at work pushing and pulling media in several directions simultaneously and whose interaction with each other is unpredictable.

### **3. WHEN IS MEDIA?**

For user-generated content and social media systems based on interpersonal communication, it is no longer as clear as it once was where communication ends and media begins. Social media platforms are recalibrating our very understanding of what a medium is. The lack of clarity around media can be seen in the ways we now talk of media devices, whose range and scope are proliferating. We are finding new kinds of knowledge about and uses for the media which are increasingly challenging our earlier distinctions and separations between the worlds of "media" and "non-media", between media markets and retail and financial services. If this makes assessments of the social and political significance of these media devices all the more urgent, it also starts to foreground what is different about them:

What is clearly happening is that there are many, many, many more people speaking in public or some version of public without having to ask permission, some of whom seem to be able to accumulate large audiences, with some gaining audiences on the scale of traditional broadcast television or feature films. (Andrew Blau in Rosenbaum, 2011:123)

At the heart of these difficulties is the diminishing distance between when something is media communication and when it is simply interpersonal communication. While the term “media device” has clearly grown up to accommodate this uncertainty, it cannot instruct us on how best to navigate a contemporary circumstance where interpersonal communication and media communication mingle through the social media platform, making these platforms not quite interpersonal communication and not quite media communication. In circumstances where it is difficult to establish where communication ends and where media begins, it becomes harder to frame an appropriate regulatory framework. The old regulatory settlements between mediated personal communication based on telephony and media settlements based on broadcasting strain in an environment of not quite one and not quite the other. It is uncertain whether our existing ethics about what is appropriate, on the one hand, to media speech and, on the other hand, to interpersonal speech are capable of dealing with circumstances where social media messaging that can begin at a limited interpersonal level, mingles with professional journalistic story-telling, and then becomes viral media communication.

This uncertainty about “when is media” points to the new configurations our discipline of Communication and Media is entering. We now have two distinct ways of thinking about media. From a communication-centric standpoint, these new circumstances emphasise the continuing importance of and extension of interpersonal, group and organisational communication dynamics, placing communication not media at the heart of the discipline. In this context, the advent of social media and the centrality of user profiles and user activity provide a vindication for a focus upon and an insistence of the centrality of organisational, intercultural, interpersonal communication and interaction to shaping our world. It is almost as if media is dissolved into a broader and integrated communication world.

However, from a media-centric standpoint, social media represents the mediatisation of interpersonal communication, making media and media logics more central as (interpersonal) communication dynamics become more akin to media communication dynamics. These mediatising processes are reorganising word-of-mouth and domesticating the social to an advertiser- and marketer-supported media system. From this standpoint we are seeing the further extension of media and media logics.

It is not only our curriculum that is simultaneously and necessarily caught in this double movement but it is also our ways of analysing and advising as communication specialists. Whether we take a communication-centric or media-centric view or hold a view encompassing both, it will affect how we think about social inclusion and exclusion and the kind of remedies we seek.

Either way it seems that public relations – that practice which straddles the media and the interpersonal and organisational – is becoming increasingly central. Mirroring these larger shifts,

public relations is becoming a space in which media production activity is now required. The contemporary interest in branded content recalls the advertiser and marketer dominated radio production units of the 1930s to 1950s. The renewed interest in public interest public relations and public relations ethics (Johnston, 2016) is a response to this new centrality of public relations, as it fills a vacuum created by the erosion of journalism's gatekeeping and quality control functions. The rise of branded content and the often unacknowledged spread through interpersonal networks of commercial speech bring with them additional complications. Journalism and commentary are becoming more dependent on other entities paying for this journalism and commentary. The model of the American *Huffington Post* with its narrow band of paid employees and its bevy of unpaid contributors is sustainable only where these unpaid contributors are producing their news content as a form of branded content as part of their paying job. This raises the question of what kind of enterprises will undertake this branded content and what news agenda they will have. It also makes pressing the need to identify the modifications and expectations of serving the public interest that are now needed of public relations professionals in their professional practice given their new responsibilities for news and information provision (see Johnston, 2016).

For all of the undoubted advantages of our new communications and media settlements, the declining role of the traditional news media vis-à-vis social media presents a most pressing social and political problem. We are caught between a declining news media system built on radio, broadcast television, newspapers and magazines on the one hand and a news system anchored in the platform press and its user profiles (Bell & Owen, 2017). In our older broadcast and print media system wider public benefits accrued from advertisers needing to pay to reach people they were not interested in because that was the only way to get access to the people advertisers were interested in. This wastage from the vantage point of the advertiser allowed broad and equitable access to media communication.

Furthermore, the circumstance of newspapers, magazines, radio and television carved out separations between editorial and advertising. Supported by their public licence to operate – informal in print and formalised in broadcasting – these circumstances ensured a modicum of journalistic standards and accountability and contributed in no small measure to South Africa's distinguished history of both principled journalism (Trabold, 2017) and its contemporary "rude health" (Duncan, 2017b). We now live in an era of increasingly targeted communication. News does not have the same central role in social media organisations as it had in print, broadcasting media and their online supplements. South African newspaper and magazine circulation, like the circulation in many other countries, has declined significantly over the past decade (Patterson, 2017) just as media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn have grown, with Facebook in particular now in a position to be a "rival to radio and TV for reaching the broader population" (Patricios & Goldstuck, 2018). For their part, these social media platforms do not significantly invest in the "platform press". At the same time the sharp declines in print journalism – together with more slowly declining broadcast revenues – means journalism no longer has the deep pockets to fund, let alone defend, in-depth reporting. Social media also drives a growing "imagined community" deficit as social media communication networks point as much away from national collective spaces as towards them. This weakens "local" media with their

associated localising dynamics, as social media's individualising and personalising dynamics are just as likely to foreground international as national and local news. This implies a growing news vacuum and even threat of news deserts in regional areas of the sort Abernathy (2016) has identified in the USA. This in turn has significant implications for accountability and social inclusion. Already a problem in the USA and Australia, it is likely to become more of a problem in South Africa.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The transformations in communication we have considered here are neither an unalloyed benefit nor an unmitigated curse. We can see social inclusion benefits in the new mobile communications dispensation and its service provision. Mobile phones have given unprecedented access to the internet. But they have also generated new sources of exclusion in mobile internet underclasses. Social media has enabled community and political activism at lower cost and at scale. But it has also mobilised hate speech and fomented communal violence, spread targeted misinformation and been a vehicle for social polarisation. We can acknowledge the global connectivity and decentralising capacity of our social media platforms – the Facebooks, Googles and their successors – while being concerned about their commercialisation of speech, their global market power and their impact on our news and political systems. Across each of the areas discussed above we see this same duality of communication and media developments promoting social inclusion and exclusion – simultaneously promising both alleviation and exacerbation of existing inequalities and social exclusions.

In this paper I have sought to identify a range of common issues South Africa shares with other countries and the centrality within these of our environmental changes in communication and media. I have done so to suggest that alongside the necessary focus on the local particularities of South Africa's political, social, economic, and media and communications landscapes there is some value in stepping back to take a broader overview of the changing media and communication landscape and the several fault-lines within it that South Africa finds itself enmeshed in. This provides a supplementary focus for attention, working, as it were, "outside in" rather than "inside out" to illuminate South African configurations as a microcosm of broader international trends. It is animated by a concern that there is some value in recognising the several ways in which specific South African problems are shared global problems. Yes, South African problems are sui generis and rooted in its apartheid history and post-apartheid settlements but they are also connected with and inflected by global political, economic and social orderings which intersect with and shape the contours and possibilities of its national settlements.

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