

Revitalising Indigenous Resistance and Dissent through Online Media

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Abstract

Indigenous peoples continue to experience exclusion from mediated mainstream public sphere debates. In Australia, recent government funding cuts suppress opportunities for Aboriginal resistance and dissent. Long-standing Aboriginal print media have ceased publication. Public broadcasters have cancelled Indigenous news services, and a 2014 Commission of Audit recommended culling the community broadcasting sector. This is in direct opposition to Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights which stresses that all people have the right to “without interference...receive and impart information and ideas through any media”.

This presentation considers the ways in which online media may overcome the silencing of dissenting Indigenous voices and broaden public sphere access and engagement. Based on interviews carried out with Canadian and Australian traditional print journalists, bloggers and social media producers this project investigates how online media circulate news and information to Indigenous communities and inject Aboriginal perspectives into public sphere debates. The presentation interrogates the diversity of current Indigenous online media and considers whether access to online and mobile media technologies expands or inhibits democratic participation. How successfully Indigenous media producers have upskilled to meet the demands of multimedia platforms is discussed, along with unique challenges they face in relation to funding, responsibilities and community expectations. The investigation concludes that online media are facilitating a revitalisation of grassroots media production that counters the exclusion of Indigenous voices from democratic conversations. However, while they enhance the circulation of Indigenous perspectives and information, demand for multimedia delivery results in ‘two-speed’ Indigenous public sphere processes.

Keywords

Indigenous, democracy, public sphere, online media, communication

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Introduction

A cornerstone of democracy is that all citizens should have fair and equal access to democratic conversations. Mass media provide the primary mechanisms through which these conversations occur. However, in reality mass media structures and processes often exclude minority groups such as Indigenous Canadians and Australians, and prevent their participation in debates that may relate directly to their individual and community well-being. To counter their exclusion from public sphere processes, Indigenous people have produced their own media. However, these media are often susceptible to funding, editorial and legal challenges. The rise of the internet and user-generated media potentially provides Indigenous peoples with media production opportunities that can counter democratic inequalities and provide them with greater access, control and power over their communication processes and messages. This paper draws on a series of interviews with Indigenous media producers across Canada and Australia, and analysis of digital media content. It investigates to what extent the internet and user-generated content are improving the access and diversity of Indigenous voices, within Indigenous and dominant public sphere debates. Overall, this paper argues online media are facilitating a revitalisation of grassroots media production that counters the exclusion of Indigenous voices from democratic conversations. However, while they enhance the circulation of Indigenous perspectives and information, demands for multimedia delivery results in 'two-speed' Indigenous public sphere processes.

Canvassing the literature

Fair and equal democratic processes must allow all citizens equal access to democratic conversations (Poodle 1989; Garnham 2000; Fraser 1990). These conversations occur within the political or dominant public sphere which is the space between society and the State where citizens debate issues of concern to them in order to influence public opinion and public policy and decision-making (Gerhards & Schafer 2010; Fraser 1990). Habermas (1974: 49) wrote "a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body" and he has argued (1996: 359) the political public sphere is "a sounding board for problems that must be processed by the political system because they cannot be solved elsewhere". Mass media have historically provided the main communication channels through which the State informs the citizenry, and the citizenry's responses are circulated (Cottle 2000). However, both Castells (2008: 90) and Dahlgren (2015: 90) argue horizontal methods of communication, including face-to-face conversations, are essential components of the communication processes through which "nonstate actors influence people's minds and foster social change". The advent of the internet and user-generated media, have to at least a degree, usurped mass media's dominance and exclusivity (Bruns 2008). Dahlgren (2015: 22) considers the internet a "boon for civil society: [since] it permits and indeed promotes horizontal communication". Similarly, Gerhards and Schafer (2010: 145) have described "internet communication" as a better public sphere than "the old mass media". Likewise, Castell (2008: 90) has identified emerging 'global media and internet networks' as "the new global public sphere".

Nancy Fraser (1990) challenged Habermas's (1989) original public sphere theory by arguing it failed to recognise the existence of alternative public spheres and that subaltern counterpublics had always existed and there had always been conflict between them and the dominant public sphere. Eley (1999) also criticised Habermas's

lack of acknowledgement of the existence of competing publics. However, Fraser (1990) also contends subordinated groups are denied equal access to societal debates within the dominant public sphere. She argues they are excluded, silenced and prevented or inhibited from communicating using their own voices, styles and norms. Therefore, subaltern counterpublic spheres provide spaces for subordinate groups in society to “invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs (Fraser 1990: 66). Subaltern counterpublics are “spaces of withdrawal and regroupment”, “bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics”. US scholar, Catherine Squires (1999) developed a four-phased framework of signifiers (later modified to three-phase (2002)) through which to interrogate individual public sphere nuances and to compare interactions between subaltern publics and the dominant public sphere. Squires (1999) argued the level and frequency of oscillation dictates whether ideas and information can cross public sphere boundaries and the likelihood of change occurring. A subaltern public sphere’s potential to exact social change increases as interactions between it and the dominant public sphere develop (Squires 1999). During its embryonic phase (or enclave stage), subaltern public communication may be covert and limited to constituents; and communication from the dominant public sphere is likely to paternalistic and patronising (Squires 1999; 2002).

As a subaltern public sphere's communication structures evolve, constituents will develop greater freedom to speak in their own voices and to dictate how they communicate. Furthermore, Squires suggests oscillation between the subaltern and dominant public will advance from one- to two-way information flows. Subaltern publics are usually culturally bonded (Squires 1999) and constituents use culturally appropriate communication styles and techniques that facilitate debate, promote their own identity and challenge stereotypes. As a subaltern public sphere matures and reaches what Squires (2002: 460) describes as the “counterpublic” phase, constituents will no longer feel the need hide their own texts and scripts. They may make “tactical strikes into the dominant public sphere” (Squires 1999: 35) and the public is strong enough to undertake “sustained social movement activity” and to take political action in order to “transform” debates and generate political action (1999: 36). However, more assertive, confident interactions may force or encourage the State or other dominant public sphere institutions to enter into negotiations with the subordinate group (Squires 1999). Should a public sphere develop to the satellite or parallel phase, Squires suggests information will flow freely across public sphere boundaries, and oppression from the dominant public sphere will no longer occur. In the satellite or parallel phase, subaltern counterpublic sphere members have equality with the dominant group, and their cultural differences are accepted (Squires 1999; 2002). These signifiers will be used to evaluate Indigenous subaltern public sphere communication using the internet and user-generated media.

Bruns (2008: 68-69) describes the emerging, new global public sphere as a “patchwork of overlapping public spheres centred around specific themes and communities”, however, this patchwork of overlapping public spheres that focus on “specific themes and communities” has always existed (Fraser 1990; Squires 1999, 2002; Eley 1999; Avison & Meadows 2000; Burrows 2009). What has changed, as Bruns (2008) himself acknowledges, is the access subaltern public sphere constituents now have to dominant public sphere debates. In an expanding mediasphere,

individuals and organisations control how, when and what messages are circulated and subaltern public sphere constituents use their own voices, their chosen communication style and what they say or write to a much greater extent.

Traditionally, journalists and editors have operated as “orchestrators and moderators of public debate” and have dominated public sphere processes and created the “one-to-many mass media of the industrial age” (Bruns 2008: 67). However, Bruns (2008: 67) argues this “one-to-many” structure, with its vertical information flows, has been replaced by “many-to-many, user-led media” that open up public sphere discussions through their horizontal information flows. Citizens can now “conduct engaged and lively political discussion and deliberation away from the perceived spin of journalism’s punditariat” through media they create and produce (Bruns 2008: 68). Within this evolving media environment, citizens are active participants in the political conversation rather than bystanders observing the manufactured perspectives of the political left and right (Bruns 2008: 68). Citizens can (to a greater degree) now control their own interaction and moderate their own contributions (Bruns 2008; Gerhards & Schafer 2010). And these changes are contributing to the emergence of a “vastly more multiperspectival debate” (Bruns 2008: 68). This paper will consider how Canadian and Australian media producers are contributing to a global public sphere.

Research design

This paper reports on a pilot study that connects to a larger research project that investigates how the internet and user-generated media have affected Indigenous media producers and enabled them to participate in both Indigenous and dominant public sphere discussions. This project’s primary research question considers how Indigenous media producers are adopting the use of digital media and how they are transitioning to access the online media environment. This paper particularly focuses on print and text-based media and draws on 18 in-depth, semi-structured, interviews with Indigenous media producers across Canada and Australia and a textual analysis of online media content. Interviews were coded manually and using Nvivo qualitative data analysis software to extract key themes emerging from the data. Nvivo Capture software was used to collect digital data such as website content, blog, Facebook and Twitter posts and comments. Nvivo Capture gathers both original posts from the primary user, and responses from their audience. Additionally, Nvivo Capture uses the member’s Twitter contact information to map commenter’s locations. These maps were used in this research to provide indicative data about Indigenous Twitter users global audience reach.

Connections between Canada and Australia

Despite the geographic distance between Canada and Australia, they have much in common. Both countries share a history of colonisation and there are parallels between the Australian and Canadian authorities subsequent treatment of each country’s First Nations peoples. Indigenous people in Canada and Australia existed under “discriminatory and genocidal regimes” that left them “transformed, displaced and marginalised” (Coombs 2006: 1-2). They “were considered inferior, scarcely human – their presence was ignored, treated as a minor inconvenience, walled off from view or physical intrusion, or made the subject of genocidal projects” (Bateman & Pilkington 2011: 1). The similarities between the two Indigenous populations continue and in 2011, only 4.3 per cent of Canadians identified as Aboriginal compared (Statistics Canada 2011) to 2.5 per cent of Australians who identified as

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ABS 2012a). Furthermore, both groups have a high percentage of young people. The median age of Aboriginal Canadians was 27.7 in 2011 (ESDC 2015), and the median age of Australia's Aboriginal population is 21 (ABS 2012b).

Both Canadian and Australian First Nation communities have had negative interactions with mainstream media. While mainstream media provide the primary mechanisms through which democratic debates take place with the aim of influencing public opinion and bringing about social change, both groups have experienced exclusion from mainstream media coverage that purports to cover issues specifically affecting them (Meadows 2005; Alia 2010). Canadian mainstream media have portrayed First Nation peoples as "outsider[s]" (Roth 2005: 14). And when mainstream media coverage does occur, it has been criticised for being sensationalistic and for perpetuating racial stereotypes (Meadows 2001). Mainstream coverage includes few Indigenous voices apart from those that are considered palatable by the dominant group (Meadows & Oldham 1991; Burrows 2004). To counter these long-standing negative mainstream media traits, from the 19th century onwards, Indigenous people have produced their own media in order to speak in their own voices, to ensure issues of concern to them are covered and that the perspectives they deem essential are heard.

Silencing Indigenous voices

Despite Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights stressing that all people have the right to "without interference... receive and impart information and ideas through any media" (United Nations 1948), in Australia particularly, the range of traditional Indigenous media has narrowed over the last two years. In 2014, Australian Government funding to The Vibe group, which had operated since 1997, was cancelled (Kerin, 2014). The Vibe group produced and managed The Deadly Awards, which were the annual Australian Indigenous Awards for achievement across a range of sectors. Vibe also produced Vibe3on3 basketball and hip hop challenge. Vibe produced InVibe Magazine, Deadly Sounds radio, Move It Mob Style TV and the deadlyvibe.com.au website (Deadly Vibe Group 2014). All of which disappeared with the cancelling of their funding. Also in 2014, the New South Wales Land Council (NSWLC) cancelled publication of the Tracker magazine (Brereton, 2014). The Tracker had a circulation of 30,000 as well as an online presence (A. McQuire, personal communication, 20 February 2015). Although NSWLC blamed funding pressures, Tracker journalist Amy McQuire said they had experienced editorial pressure from the land council, and the Tracker's closure followed their publication of a disparaging story about the Abbott federal government.

The broadcasting sector has also faced threats with an Abbott Government Commission of Audit report recommending removal of government funding for the community broadcasting sector (Gough 2014). While the government did not implement this recommendation, the suggestion was a chilling moment for the 100 Australian Indigenous community radio stations. In 2015, Australia's second national Indigenous newspaper the *National Indigenous Times*, went into voluntary receivership because of its inability to pay mounting legal costs relating to defamation and an unfair dismissal legal challenge (Terzon 2015). In 2011, Australia's Special Broadcasting Service, the SBS, absorbed the National Indigenous Television network. However in June 2015, following federal government funding cuts, the SBS decided to cancel the nightly national NITV News program (Robin 2015). NITV News was

Australia's only daily national Indigenous-produced news broadcast. Threats to Indigenous media demonstrate the importance of mechanisms that can provide Indigenous people with independent media production opportunities.

Conceptualising an evolving Indigenous public sphere

This section provides a potted overview of the development and structure of the Indigenous mediasphere. Since the 19th century, Canadian and Australian First Nations people and communities have produced a wide-range of print media (Avison 1996; Burrows 2009). The first North American Aboriginal newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, was published in 1828 (Avison & Meadows 2000) with Australia's first Aboriginal publication, *The Aboriginal or Flinders Island Chronicle* appearing in 1836 (Burrows 2014). Within the contemporary Indigenous public sphere, the *Koori Mail*, the first and only surviving national Australian Indigenous newspaper was first published in 1991. Both Canada and Australia have rich Indigenous broadcast sectors. Broadcasts of Aboriginal produced content began in North America in Alaska during the 1930s, with the first Canadian Aboriginal broadcasts occurring in the 1960s (Alia 2003: 37). In 1999, the national Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) was launched incorporating both domestic and international content (Roth 2005). Roth (2005: 24) explains the APTN took advantage of the increasing range of international, Indigenous content and adopted an "international perspective" with a "wide optic on aboriginal issues around the world". Alia (2010:72) has described Canada as "the world leader in Aboriginal broadcasting" with several hundred radio stations, eleven regional radio networks and... six television production outlets. Similarly, Australia has a well-developed Indigenous broadcasting sector. The first Aboriginal produced radio programming was broadcast in Adelaide and Townsville in 1972 (Australian Government 2010). Since then the sector has grown to include more than 130 Indigenous radio stations and in 1988, the commercially-funded Imparja Television began broadcasting. This was followed by the development of the federally-funded National Indigenous Television in 2005. The community media sector provides a 'major communication outlet for indigenous voices' (Meadows 2009: 516). However, the availability of the internet and online media and funding pressures have changed the structure of the Indigenous mediasphere.

This paper suggests the Indigenous mediasphere now includes two overlapping sectors. The 'traditional' sector that includes traditional print media (magazines and newspapers) and the broadcast sector (television and radio - Commercial, public and community). The second 'user-generated' sector includes digital content such as weblogs, news and information sites and online publications. The 'user-generated' sector also incorporates Indigenous peoples' use of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Vimeo, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Google+, Tumblr and other social media sites. Indigenous people are using all available user-generated media options to disseminate their individual and group perspectives. However, it is argued there are two distinct sectors within the contemporary Indigenous mediasphere, the sectors overlap. Traditional Indigenous print media producers now often duplicate their print newspaper in online, digital format (or at least selected content) and some have opted to publish their content exclusively online. Traditionally print publications may also include audio and video content in their online site. Likewise, Indigenous broadcasters now upload print, audio and video content to their station websites. And traditional Indigenous media producers (print and broadcast), bloggers, website producers all use various forms of social media, in addition to their primary communication method, to

connect with their audience. Consequently, the lines between traditional Indigenous media producers and user-generated content have converged.

The effect on media producers and communities

Funding pressures and audience expectations are driving the adoption of online and multimedia platforms and a faster news cycle. Vancouver Island's *Salish Sea Sentinel* editor Mark Kiemele (Personal communication, 23 July 2013) and Manitoba publication *The First Perspective* journalist Trevor Greyeyes (Personal communication, 10 August 2013) said their publications were now only delivered online. They each said the decision to move their publications to an online-only format was a cost-saving measure but had led to community criticism since older community members may lack easy access to the internet and some prefer to receive a print version of their community newspaper. Vancouver Island *Ha-Shilth-Sa* editor Debora Steel (Personal communication, 23 July 2013); Nuuchalnat Tribal Council (2015) said they now produced a print and online version of their newspaper. She said meeting the needs of digitally-savvy, younger community members who wanted faster, up-to-date news had motivated this decision. Both Canada and Australia have a growing number of online newspapers including Canada's *Intercontinental Cry* that uses a network of stringers to publish international Indigenous news (CWIS 2015) and Australia's *Black Nations Rising* (which replaces Brisbane Blacks) (WAR 2015).

Bloggers represent an important and growing user-generated sector of the Indigenous mediasphere. Blogs provide a voice for those who want to be heard but who cannot speak through mainstream media. Bloggers Eugenia Flynn with her *Black Thoughts Live Here* (Flynn 2015) and Celeste Liddle with her *Rantings of a Female Feminist* (Liddle 2015a) use blogs to circulate their perspectives on a range of contemporary topics and to counter stereotypes and challenge government policy. Blogs also provide access to minorities within the Indigenous community. Canada's Lisa Charleyboy used her *Urban Native Girl* blog to provide positive messages for Indigenous youth. Her blog helped her to develop a strong media profile and she now produces and edits the online *Urban Native Magazine* (Charleyboy 2015). In Australia, Celeste Liddle and Eugenia Flynn have both been invited to publish in a range of alternative publications including the popular and influential online publication *Crikey*, and both have been offered regular commentary spots with *The Guardian* online (Flynn n.d.; Flynn 2012; Flynn & Onus 2014; Flynn 2014; Liddle n.d.; Liddle 2014; Liddle 2015b). These opportunities provide access to a mainstream audience that was previously unavailable. Axel Bruns (2008) has argued the internet as provided mainstream media access and profiles for a range of alternative voices, and this is true within the Indigenous public sphere too.

Social media has further expanded the Indigenous mediasphere. Almost all the people I spoke to said Facebook was an essential aspect of Indigenous communication. Canada's *NationTalk* CEO Don Barraclough (personal communication, 1 August 2013) said Facebook encouraged First Nations people and leaders to use computers. And *Ha-Shilth-Sa*'s Debora Steel (personal communication, 23 July 2013) said their Facebook page participation rivalled their newspapers print circulation. Indigenous journalists Trevor Greyeyes (personal communication, 10 August 2013) and Amy McQuire (personal communication, 20 February 2015) both explained they use Facebook to find sources to interview and to connect with other journalists. While

blogger and photographer Steven Rhall (personal communication, 1 June 2015) and writer Eugenia Flynn (personal communication, 4 June 2015) said it was essential for them to use social media to promote their work. And some media producers such as *Black Rainbow* founder Dameyon Bonson (personal communication, 12 February 2015) and *Wiradjuri News's* David Towney (personal communication, 21 May 2015) use Facebook to produce standalone news sites. Towney uses *Wiradjuri News* to share mainstream news stories he believes will be of interest to the Wiradjuri community. One story about the water being turned off to force 12,000 people to leave their community attracted 737 shares, 225 likes and more than 40 comments. *Wiradjuri News* Facebook statistics show the site has clocked more than 100,000 views in one week (*Wiradjuri News*, 2015). Given Australia's only surviving national newspaper, the *Koori Mail* has a circulation of 10,000 and a readership of 100,000 (*Koori Mail*, 2015), *Wiradjuri News's* achievement is notable. Social media are an integral element in creating a horizontal relationship between media producers, their peers and audience. However, while the interactivity of online media enhances connectedness between media producers and their audiences, it also increases pressure on production staff who may have gone from producing one newspaper a week, a fortnight or a month, to regularly having to upload digital content and to managing a number of social media sites. None of the people I interviewed had received any specific training in how to use software, apps or to manage social media. Bloggers, who may work in other jobs in addition to producing a blog, must also maintain a social media presence if they want to effectively promote their writing.

Case study one: *Two Row Times*

Jonathan Garlow founded the *Two Row Times* in Hagersville, Ontario in 2013, and it now has a print circulation of 23,000. The print newspaper is delivered to communities at no cost and the publication also shares content via the *Two Row Times* website and through the online reader Issuu. A defining feature of the *Two Row Times* is its diverse social media profile and web presence. The producers are trying to cover all the major social media including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, Pinterest, Instagram and more. The paper's target audience is the Six Nations of the Grand River which includes all six Iroquois nations that number more than 25,000 members and is the largest First Nations band government in Canada. The paper is distributed throughout Ontario and Upstate New York (*Two Row Times*, 2015; Jim Windle, personal communication, 31 July 2013). In contrast to Vancouver Island's *Ha-Shilth-Sa* and *Salish Sea Sentinel*, the *Two Row Times* is an independent Indigenous newspaper and is not publishing on behalf of the tribal council or any other funding organisation. In 2013, Garlow explained his was "...to provide timely and relevant news and information to Native communities as well as to serve as a bridge between all nations by promoting and demonstrating the values of the Two Row Wampum." (Founder, Jonathan Garlow, August 2013).

To resolve the fledgling newspaper's financial challenges, the owners ran a crowd-funding appeal to try to raise CAD\$25,000 additional funding. The appeal achieved 16 per cent of its goal (CAD\$3899) (Indiegogo 2014). In the campaign video Nahnda Garlow, a *Two Row Times*, Arts & Culture columnist, highlighted the lack of "strong voice[s] in mainstream media to "stand and speak the voice of the people". She also stressed that the *Two Row Times* is "Indigenous led" and is not "led by another institution that is dictating what is Indigenous or what is First Nations or is Aboriginal" (Indiegogo 2014). The campaign also explained they planned to use the funds to "hire Onkwehon:we journalists and correspondents, employ the distributors

that keep more than 500 pickup locations stocked with papers, and to of course print the paper and keep our office running". Although the crowd-funding campaign enjoyed limited success, the *Two Row Times* is still published in print and digital format. This Nvivo map (Figure 1) plots the location of the *Two Row Times* 4337 Twitter followers shows it is successfully reaching its North American target audience.

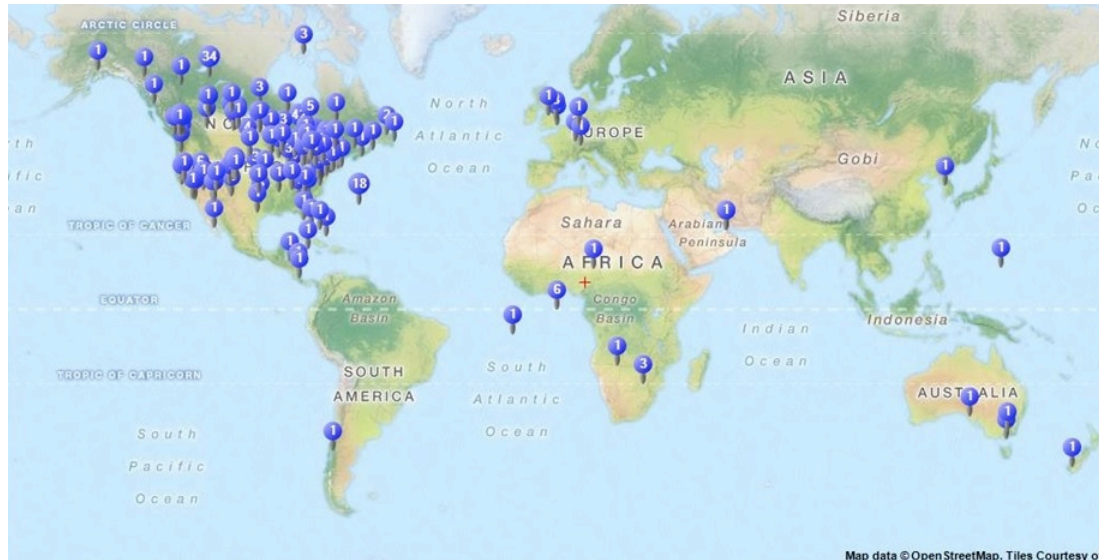


Figure 1 Two Row Times Twitter Followers

Case Study 2 - *Indigenous X*

Luke Pearson founded *IndigenousX* in 2012. It is a rotating, curated, Twitter account that demonstrates the unique ways Indigenous communicators are using social media. Each month, the *IndigenousX* baton passes to a different Indigenous user who can tweet to the account's more than 21,000 followers about an issue of concern to them and those followers can in turn retweet that information. Since 2012, more than 180 Indigenous Australians have shared their perspectives, knowledge and ideas relating to health, education, constitutional recognition, Aboriginal culture, closure of communities, meaningless rhetoric, reconciliation, music, Indigenous literature, sport and many other topics. It is highly unlikely that most of those 180 people would have been chosen by mainstream journalists to speak on these topics.

Apart from attracting a large Twitter following, *IndigenousX's* success has led to an opportunity for each contributor to publish a blog post on *The Guardian* online website thus extending the reach of their contribution and their ability to reach a broader, mainstream audience. Pearson has also allowed two Indigenous people in Canada to replicate the *IndigenousX* process using the *IndigenousX* branding, and he hopes to find an Indigenous person in New Zealand and other countries to pick up the *IndigenousX* baton.

Despite its success, *IndigenousX* struggles financially. Pearson runs the media organisation on a shoestring and in 2015 launched a crowd-funding appeal for AU\$250,000 to bolster the financial resources he requires to sustain *IndigenousX's* production and to extend its reach. Pearson told The Walkley Foundation (2015), "We need more strong Indigenous media voices, and we need to make sure those voices reach far and wide, and with your support that's what we aim to achieve". The appeal attracted AU\$81,966 in funding. The Nvivo map below (Figure 2) demonstrates that *IndigenousX* has successfully attracted a global following that extends far beyond

Australia. *IndigenousX* has innovatively enhanced the diversity of voices participating in Indigenous and dominant public sphere debates.



Figure 2 IndigenousX Twitter Followers

Discussion and conclusion

Analysis of the broader, contemporary Indigenous mediasphere shows access to the internet, and ability to produce, control and share media has enhanced the diversity of Indigenous media voices within Indigenous and dominant public sphere debates. The Indigenous mediasphere has broadened and now includes traditional media such as print newspapers and broadcast media and a growing range of online publications, blogs and social media using Twitter and Facebook that demonstrate unique and innovative media communication styles. The downside to this expanding mediasphere is the pressure it places on Indigenous media producers, whether they produce traditional or user-generated content, in relation to workloads and funding.

Digital and mobile technologies and digital and social media have facilitated access to democratic discussions for Indigenous communicators in Canada and Australia. As Bruns (2008), Dahlgren (2015) and Castells (2008) suggested, Indigenous people are engaging in horizontal and two-way discussions and debates about issues that affect them. These horizontal information flows allow Indigenous media producers and their audience, to debate, challenge and provide counter-discourses to government policy and practice and mass media representations of their communities. Indigenous participants can counter the mass media's exclusion of Indigenous voices and perspectives and control the circulation of messages, individual participation and challenge ideas and policy with which they support or disagree.

The internet and online media are facilitating dissemination of Indigenous perspectives towards mainstream publics. The control journalists, editors (even Indigenous media journalists and editors), politicians and government officials have

had over who participates in democratic debates affecting Indigenous people has been eroded. Writers such as Eugenia Flynn, Celeste Liddle or Lisa Charleyboy access Indigenous and mainstream audiences through their blogs. This access and their success as writers and commentators has allowed them to speak out and be heard by a wider audience. Indigenous media producers have adapted social media and online communication mediums for their own purposes. Pearson's *IndigenousX* is a unique and innovative concept that has generated a broad Indigenous and general audience and given voice to 180 Indigenous Australians on a range of topics. Similarly, Towney and Bonson have used Facebook to inform their audience on topics of interest and concern to specific groups within the broader Indigenous community. As Bruns (2008: 76) contended in relation to "issue publics" the internet and online media have "...given rise to a new class of topical experts...whose knowledge may not be conventionally accredited, but who derive their authority through the community processes...". Individuals decide what they will discuss and what content they will engage with. The audience determines whether the perspectives presented are of value or not. In turn, those who generate community interest gain access to mainstream media through sites such as *The Guardian*, and mainstream audiences through a range of alternative, online but not exclusively Indigenous, media. Roth (2005: 13-14) argued:

First Peoples self-development involves not only control over production and distribution of their own messages to their own communities but also the seeking of cross-cultural links and coalitions through program content considerations and through diffusion to populations outside of their immediate regional territories.

Online media and the internet provide opportunities to produce and distribute media content that they can share with their own local communities, broader global Indigenous peoples and mainstream society.

Fraser (1990) and Squires (1999; 2002) provided signifiers through which to evaluate the development of subaltern public spheres. Analysis of online Indigenous media suggests they are affording Canadian and Australian Indigenous people with freedom to speak in their own voices and to dictate how and when they communicate. Online media, both traditional and user-generated, provide opportunities to challenge and resist stereotypical ideas and government policy. For instance, Liddle's (2015b) challenge of the notion that Indigenous women are "welfare 'cash cows'". Or Towney's curated discussions through *Wiradjuri News* that debate and challenge the closure of Aboriginal communities or domestic violence. Similarly, *IndigenousX* and Liddle's (2015) *Constitutional Recognition Survey* challenges government propaganda regarding constitutional recognition. While it goes beyond the scope of this paper to discuss whether Indigenous engagement using their own media results in policy change, the willingness and ability to challenge and indeed, make "tactical strikes into the dominant public sphere" suggests Indigenous public sphere processes are in a "counterpublic" sphere phase. However, the withdrawal of funding and shutting down of Indigenous voices shows Indigenous people and their right to engage with and produce their own media without interference is not yet a reality. Whether this growing range of Indigenous media can influence public opinion and policy is as yet unclear, but the internet and user-generated media are producing a resurgence in independent Indigenous media.

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