

MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT

Alamy



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Online environments have become the spaces where people gather and where community is built

The era of e-friends

Nick Stevens talks to Aleks Krotoski, academic, journalist and TV presenter on why people use social media, coping with information overload and preventing digital discrimination

NICK STEVENS Do people actually need digital social media like Twitter or Facebook?

ALEKS KROTOSKI Well, just as not everyone needs a television, not everyone needs the internet and social media. You still get physical water cooler conversations about news, entertainment or gossip but what we're seeing is that people who take up new media technologies like Facebook or Twitter are using them as virtual water coolers.

These online environments have become the spaces where people gather, where community is built, where experience and exchange happen, and where people have those off-the-cuff conversations that help to build friendship and a sense of belonging.

For me digital or online interaction is very much a part of my life. It is my source of information so I need it for my work and my research. It's my source of social life because I can see what my friends are up to and they can see what I'm up to. And it's also my source of self-promotion, letting me share with an audience the work that I do, and to get feedback. The caveat would be that things like Twitter can be too much about self-

promotion; too much about demonstrating amazing experiences and achievements so if you're not doing amazing things yourself you feel that your life is lacking.

NS Can digital media ever replace physical social interaction? And if they can, is that a good or a bad thing?

AK I think digital media simply extend the offline experience by augmenting social interaction. Before Web 2.0 the objective of a website was to get people to land and stick there because the website would make its money through advertising.

The Web 2.0 phenomenon really instilled more social interaction and encouraged people to express themselves in really interesting ways, whether it was through blogs or photographs, or simply through maintaining or making connections with other users. A huge new crop of websites and services emerged that were all about bringing people together online around a common theme, a community of practice, and then encouraging them to leave and go and interact with each other offline.



➤ That's something that social networks are very good at instilling. They're also very good at helping people to organise in terms of protest, galvanise in terms of action and to raise awareness of things like charitable organisations.

NS But don't online social media detract from the idea of a Big Society by taking away people's personal engagement with society?

AK Absolutely not. I'm a real online relationship proponent. I think that these spaces are the places where we gather, where we do things and where we have the conversations that help to instil a sense of community, belonging and closeness.

Just as in a telephone conversation you can hear the nuances in someone's voice, in an email or online conversation you can still have that very personal conversation in the way you write or through text or vision. I'm a staunch believer in the power of online environments to promote and support offline engagement.

NS Do you think we will see a backlash against digital social media – when it all becomes too much to stay digitally connected?

AK I don't see a backlash but there are more and more interesting projects which combine digital and analogue media. For example, the Newspaper Club is a bunch of London geeks who take the best Twitter feeds and other digital content and publish a traditional

weekly newspaper with articles that are of interest to the tech community.

Another example is Hipstamatic, the recently released iPhone app. This lets you create images that look like they were taken with a plate or film camera and then have them printed so you have a lovely tangible analogue object created with modern digital technology.

I think just as in the Romantic period when people looked back to a different age for inspiration so our lives today are digitized to the point that there is something wonderful about physical tangibility. That's why I still cherish my Brother 100 manual typewriter, 35mm film cameras and my good old rotary dial phone.

NS Do you feel heartened or threatened by how comfortable children and young people are with technology?

AK I totally accept that I'm a digital tourist. We, as an older generation of Internet users, have stumbled through and created the infrastructure and culture that now exists online and there's already some amazing interactive, playful, engaging and engrossing applications being created by people my age.

I have no idea what it is that today's young people are going to come up with but I am sure that it's definitely going to have a real effect on how we consume information and how we influence one another. I'm extremely optimistic about what they will create because quite simply they're not held back by the things that hold us back. I accept the fact that they're going to lap me and I find that exciting because I can learn from them.

Our lives are digitized to the point that there is something wonderful about physical tangibility

NS Do you worry about digital inclusion and the fact that some sectors of society that don't have access to technology may be held back?

AK The digital divide is something we've been talking about for a long time. In Britain I think internet speeds more than anything else will affect our access to digital information. For example, in certain rural areas or older towns broadband speeds are not rising although there is all this bandwidth-heavy content like YouTube videos, Big Society work, politics. Because of speed restrictions all this content could be inaccessible to certain people.

There's also a danger when governments and corporations start to rely purely on online communications and practices rather than trying to reach out to people in more traditional ways because people from parts of society and from the rest of the world could be excluded.

NS What's your strategy for coping with too much online content?

AK One of my greatest concerns is the way that online experience is actually reducing the breadth of information we find or the views we're presented with. Because there is a phenomenal amount of information available, when we parse it we rely very strongly on a set of filters. In the same way that I read a particular newspaper because it is aligned with my views or attitudes I get information through the filter of the RSS feeds that I subscribe to – the *Guardian*, the BBC, the *Independent*, the *New York Times*.

Within that I also subscribe to the technology feeds so I'm not finding out anything about education or sport. That concerns me because when you're looking through a physical newspaper you unintentionally find things that can expand your views and you just don't get that same experience online.

My friends are also my filter through social media like Twitter, Facebook and blogs. They share links with me so that expands my horizons a bit because they might have slightly different views. However, because we are increasingly choosing our friends, and interacting with them and getting our information online, serendipity is decreased and we are not able to see a broader world.

One very small strategy I've adopted is to deliberately follow three people a week on Twitter who I know I am going to disagree with. Their feeds come in and they say something that immediately makes me angry but I know I have to click on it for my own edification. I don't always like it but I like to think it makes me a better and more well-rounded person. ■



Aleks Krotoski writes for the *Guardian* and *Observer* and hosts *Tech Weekly*, their technology podcast

alekskrotoski.com

PA Photos

How much should the public know about terrorist activity in Britain?



A complex legal framework governs what can be published by the media

But this will invariably be controversial because the decision to impose restrictions will often be based on secret information which cannot be publicly tested. Many contemporary concerns are not new.

As the demands for security push the limits of accountability, Lord Shaw's observations a century ago provide a caution that is still relevant to today's open justice debates: "In the darkness of secrecy, sinister interest and evil in every shape have full swing... publicity is the very soul of justice."

The last decade has seen significant legislative changes. The police have wider powers to access media materials and there is a greatly expanded range of circumstances in which journalists may be required to reveal their sources. Such disclosure is at odds with journalists' ethical obligations and, if sources know they are vulnerable to being identified, it can make it much more difficult for journalists to obtain information. Where media materials are then used in prosecutions it creates a perception there is an alignment of the state and the media, and marginalised communities are likely to trust neither.

The wide range of terrorism offences can mean that investigative journalists especially may face legal limits on obtaining information. For example, in speaking with those who have sought to radicalise a terrorist suspect a journalist may find that they are liable to prosecution for terrorism offences.

It is often said that a balance must be struck between liberty and security, but this is not a useful way to view the issues. The protection of liberty need not be at odds with measures taken to protect the public from terrorism. On the contrary, more openness and visibility about government activities helps build citizens' trust in their government which is in turn necessary for counter-terrorism strategies to be effective in the community.

The Law, Terrorism and the Right to Know programme explores these issues, conducting interviews with those who are at the heart of information management, including journalists, media lawyers, criminal lawyers, judges, government, policing and security officials. In doing so, the programme hopes to reveal a more detailed picture of what is happening, and to develop reform proposals which serve our public interests in liberty and security more effectively. ■

www.reading.ac.uk/ltrk
www.globaluncertainties.org.uk

Right to know

How can the interests of government, law, the media and the public be balanced?

HOW DOES THE public find out about terrorist threats and actions? How do we find out about the state's attempts to investigate? These questions underpin research by Dr Lawrence McNamara for the Law, Terrorism and the Right to Know programme, part of the Research Councils UK Global Uncertainties Programme.

For most people the media will be the key source of information, but a complex legal framework governs what can be published. There are also conflicting interests at play; sometimes the authorities seem to want information to be conveyed to the public; at other times they don't. Often it appears there is selectivity and bias in the way that the state wants to present information, and in the way the media reports it.

These matters go to the heart of some of the most crucial issues facing Britain and other countries in the 21st century. The demands of national and international security, which have been so dominant in public affairs since 11 September 2001, are often said to be

such great concerns that civil liberties must on occasion be curtailed. That might include restricting and controlling information that is made available to the public.

On the other hand, long standing traditions of media freedom characterise and sustain our liberal democracy. Open, informed public debate is crucial if we are to both grasp the nature and extent of security issues and combat threats appropriately, and ensure that there is adequate scrutiny and accountability of the state in doing so.

The courts are among the most important battlegrounds. Some of the most important information about terrorism comes to light as prosecutions unfold. Here, information can be elicited, exposed and tested in ways where the parties cannot easily use spin and craft it for public consumption.

There are difficulties though. We have seen the government seek to keep information secret on national security grounds and there may on occasion be good reasons to do so.

Protection of liberty need not be at odds with protecting the public from terrorism

3D cinema: the billion pound bonanza

How the film industry is weathering the recession

IN 2009 CINEMA admissions increased by six per cent. This was despite the recession, despite the five per cent rise of ticket prices, despite the increasing popularity of videogames, and the availability of other distribution formats such as DVD, Blu-ray, video-on-demand and the internet.

How did this happen? First, a spate of hits such as *Slumdog Millionaire*, *The Hangover*, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, *Star Trek* and *Avatar* drew more people into cinemas. Second, the film exhibition industry adopted a cost-reducing innovation: digital cinema. Although they first appeared a few years ago, the number of digital screens doubled in 2009. Digital cinema lowers the cost of film copies, shortens copying time and makes switching films easier – although contractual obligations and suitcase-sized digital hard-disks driven to cinemas diminish the advantage.

Third, the industry adopted a quality-enhancing innovation: 3D cinema. Originally launched in analogue form in the 1950s, it is now digitally reinvented, eliminating the analogue drawbacks such as breakdown-prone projection and headache-causing asynchronous flicker. 3D was greatly helped by the boom in digital cinemas, as most can play it easily and cheaply, and the number of 3D screens increased six-fold and 3D revenue forty-fold.

Today, 16 per cent of admissions are for 3D movies, up from almost nothing in 2008, and we were willing to pay more for them, suggesting we find it an enjoyable quality-increase, and that ticket prices might have remained flat if we adjusted for quality.

Fourth, cinema-going has traditionally been recession-proof. In the 1930s it was hardly affected, and it did well in every recession since about 1970. This is in sharp contrast to music expenditure, which tanks in almost any recession. We replace more expensive activities such as foreign holidays, luxury meals out, live musicals, with less expensive cinema. Also, as wages moderate and available work declines, our opportunity costs fall, as what we could have gained by not watching a movie declines.

Ever since cinema emerged opportunity costs rises have dwarfed ticket price hikes. Since 1934, real ticket prices have more than doubled, while opportunity costs (linked to the wage rate) have almost quadrupled. Given the latter's almost continuous lead on the former, cinema should become ever-more recession-resistant.

A big wild card is 3D. It could boost the £900 million British post-production sector



Avatar became the highest-grossing film of all time, surpassing director James Cameron's own *Titanic*

Although you might think that new distribution platforms such as postal DVD-rentals, video-on-demand, internet and mobile threaten the viability of cinema admissions, they have actually achieved the obverse: a film release

has become a big marketing event meant to lift sales across all platforms. If it bombs, the studio loses across all platforms; if it wins, it yields far more than box office revenue. The antique delivery system drags along the new high-tech channels in its slipstream.

It is not surprising therefore that the total consumer expenditure on films in 2009, £3.7 billion, was a multiple of box office revenue. That compares to £2.9 billion on video games and £1.3 billion expenditure on music.

On the production side, the British industry also seemed to be made of Teflon®. Real expenditure increased by over 50 per cent in 2009, despite the financial crisis. Although British independent film-makers are finding it ever more difficult to get cash, the lion's share of British production expenditure comes from the Hollywood studios, who profited from a falling pound and generous tax breaks.

Film production is one of only a few sectors that immediately respond to these breaks. Expenditure rose to almost £1 billion. Similar sectors include videogames development (£625m) and media post-production (£900m). In little time, huge amounts of foreign resources can shift to Britain, resulting in significant services exports. While the last government was sinking money into cars, incentives for creative industries may have had a more durable economic impact, plus a real immaterial benefit.

We replace more expensive activities – with less expensive cinema

Ever since 2005, when the WTO (World Trade Organisation) made cultural industries an exception, countries have waged tax wars to lure them to their territories. One of the stalwarts is Quebec. The Canadian province offers a layer cake of different tax breaks, leading to an influx of videogame makers and other creatives. Three different tax incentives also rescued Hollywood from the doldrums between the early-1970s and mid-1980s.

So what does the future hold? The previous government set up the UK Film Council (UKFC), an industry body distributing subsidies and administering tax incentives, and promised a videogame tax break. The current government has axed the latter as well as the Council itself, but kept the film tax incentive. Uncertainties lie ahead, depending on what will replace the UKFC, whether the pound goes up or down, and what tax breaks other countries have up their sleeves.

A big wild card is 3D. It could further boost the burgeoning £900 million British post-production sector, and will undoubtedly further increase admissions. However, the industry is still holding its breath to see whether 3D remains a fad.

Two billion-dollar questions are whether cinemas can offer non-film live events in high-quality 3D, and whether anyone succeeds in developing technology that converts old 2D films into a top-of-the-range 3D quality, drawing us into cinemas again and enticing us to buy DVD versions for our new 3D televisions.

The latter is the ultimate wild card: it could lead to an almost unimaginable boom in cinema-going and a renaissance of the industry surpassing the CD boom in the music industry. One need only think of re-releasing Harry Potter parts one to eight, or all of the James Bond films in 3D, to see the enormity of it. Several venture-capital backed post-production companies are gambling on it, at costs ranging from 50 to 100,000 dollars per minute. Yet at present both billion-dollar questions remain unanswered: there is just a small chance of a big bonanza starting in 2011. If you are in for a gamble buy cinema stock. ■



DR GERBEN BAKKER

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Researchers have yet to identify how music is able to achieve positive effects on older people

Musical benefit

Participation in musical activities increases social engagement and well-being in older people

AS AN INCREASING number of older people are living longer there is a need to find ways to maintain their health and well-being for as long as possible. Research undertaken by a team from the Institute of Education, University of London, funded through the Research Councils' New Dynamics of Ageing Programme, has found that making music through singing or playing an instrument can make a significant difference when it comes to enhancing the quality of life of older people.

Working with the Sage Gateshead music venue and centre for music education, the Connect Programme of the Guildhall School of Music, and Westminster Adult Education Service, the research team demonstrated the power of music to transform lives, reduce depression and engender purpose and optimism in older people.

Almost 500 older people participating in music groups or other leisure activities completed questionnaires which assessed their perceived independence, competence and relationships with others. Compared to those engaged in other activities, such as painting, those participating in musical activities responded more positively to a range of statements, and indicated that they looked forward to each day, felt that their life had meaning, enjoyed their activities, felt full of energy, believed that life was full of opportunities, and that the

future looked good.

Those engaged with music reported a greater sense of accomplishment than the other groups and were more positive about their relationships with others. They also felt more in control of their lives and believed that they continued to be given the opportunity to make decisions.

Follow-up interviews with participants demonstrated the extent of the impact. One participant reported: "I get a feeling of doing

something better each week and definitely feel I am learning and improving while enjoying myself. It's one of the best things I have ever taken part in. I love it." Others reported reduced anxiety, relief from depression, release from the stress of caring for relatives with Alzheimer's and support following the death of a partner.

The participants found few barriers to engaging with the ensemble activities – those that were reported included ill-health, looking after grandchildren or other relatives, and lack of confidence.

The researchers have not yet identified the mechanisms through which music is able to achieve these positive effects on older people but the benefits are clear. The challenge now is to ensure that there are sufficient opportunities for all those who wish to actively engage in music making in older life to do so. ■

www.newdynamics.group.shef.ac.uk

Finding religion

There is more religious coverage in the media today than ever before

RELIGION IS OFTEN in the news, but media portrayals don't always match those of religious groups themselves. The way it is treated tells us a lot about popular fears and prejudices, and the place of religion in Britain's cultural heritage.

The results of two studies at the University of Leeds, in 1982-3 and 2008-9, (part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council and ESRC Religion and Society Programme) show that there is more religion in the media today than in the 1980s, despite a decline over the same period in church attendance and in most areas of Christian belief and practice.

The increased coverage results from a small rise in the number of references to Christianity, but a large increase in coverage of other religions, particularly Islam, and also Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism. However, references to alternative spiritualities are few and far between.

Most references to Islam in the newspapers and on TV portray Muslims as extremists, terrorists and radicals. Other coverage, particularly in the tabloids, refers provocatively to the 'Islamification' of Britain, or shows Islam as problematic for social integration. As public knowledge and opinion about religion is informed largely by what people read in the papers and watch on television, it is likely that such portrayals perpetuate and reinforce negative perceptions and 'Islamophobia'.

Negative reporting is not confined to Islam, however. The criminal and immoral behaviour of clergy often attracts media attention, and the liberal press frequently represent Christianity as anti-egalitarian and out-of-date on issues of gender and homosexuality.



Getty

Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 visit to Britain saw every one of his speeches and sermons broadcast live on TV

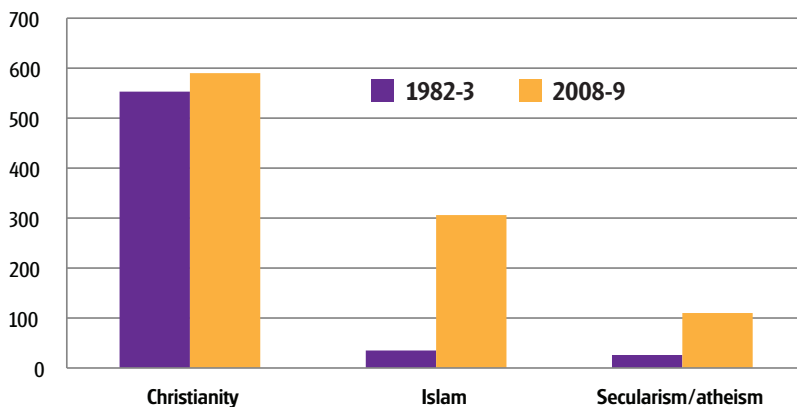
The conservative media and some Christian leaders and groups have joined together in defence of Christianity. Christian 'persecution', they have claimed, results from the government's stance on equality and human rights, and its politically correct favouritism of Muslims at the expense of Britain's Christian majority.

Such cases not only reflect contemporary ethical and political debates in the churches, but the media's own culture and rhetoric – the love of drama and controversy. Newspapers and television attract audiences by focusing on conflict, deviance and, of course, celebrity.

But there is more to media religion than Islam and Christianity. Findings show that there has been a rise in 'common religion' as well as conventional religion. A quarter of all references in the early 1980s were to supernatural beliefs, practices and issues not endorsed formally by churches and other official religious organisations. And that figure has risen to 40 per cent today, including references to magic, ghosts, fate, luck and fortune-telling.

Metaphorical and often humorous references to miracles, angels and prayer appear not only in news coverage or programmes about religion, but in sports

Media references to religion 1982-3 and 2008-9



Alamy

Most references to Islam in the media portray Muslims as extremists or radicals

Religion continues to provide fitting language for expressing wonder and fear

reporting, entertainment (including soaps, sitcoms and murder mysteries), and in TV adverts. Prayers for victory on the football pitch, suspense and tension in thrillers and horror movies, the superhuman feats of consumers of popular brands of footwear or alcohol, and the miraculous results delivered by household products are all expressed with reference to religious images.

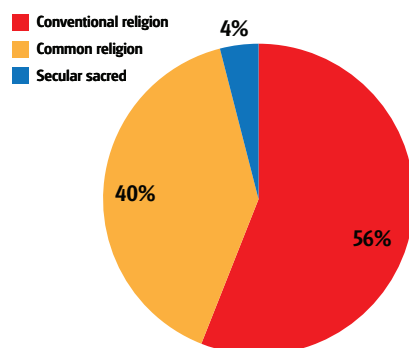
Irrespective of how many people actually participate in religion, it continues to provide fitting language for expressing wonder and fear, honouring and praising celebrities and high achievers, contemplating the unexplained, and for coping with unaccountable horror and global crisis.

As well as more references to religion we have also witnessed an increased media portrayal of secularism and atheism since the 1980s. Freedom of speech, human rights, personal choice, and the belief that religion should be a private not public matter are just some of the secular – but nonetheless sacred – views discussed and often held by media professionals themselves (who according to a YouGov poll in 2005 are less likely to hold religious beliefs than the public at large).

The growth of religious diversity has led to a rise in media references to all types of religion and belief. Religion is still reflected in the language of popular culture, and Christianity continues to be represented as part of national heritage and the British landscape. In a nation which is increasingly religiously illiterate as a result of declining participation, the media is more important than ever for informing the public about religious matters. ■

religionandsociety.org.uk

Media references to religion and the secular sacred 2008-9



Greening the arts

Putting the eco-spotlight on the dramatic arts

WITH INCREASING PRESSURE on publicly funded organisations to deliver more for less, many arts, cultural and creative organisations are reducing their operational costs and improving their image by reducing their environmental impact.

In recent years many have become involved in driving sustainability change, with some committing to becoming carbon-neutral. Some initiatives have integrated arts, science professionals and the community to pioneer practices that will fundamentally change the way arts organisations work. This complements the development of social programmes by many arts organisations, such as youth and community development projects, and education and learning programmes.

Environmental issues offer particular challenges for many arts organisations. One particular issue relates to the energy consumption of stage electrics, including lighting and sound systems. Until recently, venues had to warm up lights for hours prior to a performance to reduce the risk that they would fail. In many venues, however, this practice still continues.

The transportation of sets, props and costumes for local, national and international tours also offers unique challenges, particularly international tours, which have a negative impact on the production's ecological footprint with few possibilities of reducing that impact. And for modern venues

the use of air conditioning can contribute significantly to their carbon footprint.

The ESRC Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society (BRASS) has been working with drama organisations – including a leading theatre company, local theatre venues and a major television drama producer – to improve their environmental sustainability and to help them adapt to a low-carbon economy.

A major element of the BRASS research is the development of a specifically designed green audit. This audit benchmarks the impacts of the current production, technical, administrative and support activities, enabling an analysis of potential areas for improvement and allowing targets to be set.

The audit also suggests measures and, where relevant, creates a dissemination plan to educate everyone in the organisations. The green audit provides a baseline analysis from

which drama organisations can then make certain decisions on the direction in which they wish to proceed. The baseline information can be used to set targets for the company and form the basis for an implementation and action plan on how the company intends to reach the desired targets.

Central to the audit is the role of the drama organisation acting as data collector. This method of data collection provides the organisation with a clearer understanding of their energy, waste, water and travel impacts and, significantly, the associated costs.

The participating organisations are learning that switching to greener lighting, reducing energy consumption and reusing materials can in the medium term result in economic savings. In an era of financial austerity this can help them be more resource efficient. ■

www.brass.cf.ac.uk

Environmental issues offer particular challenges for many arts organisations



The movement of sets, props and costumes can have a negative environmental impact on productions

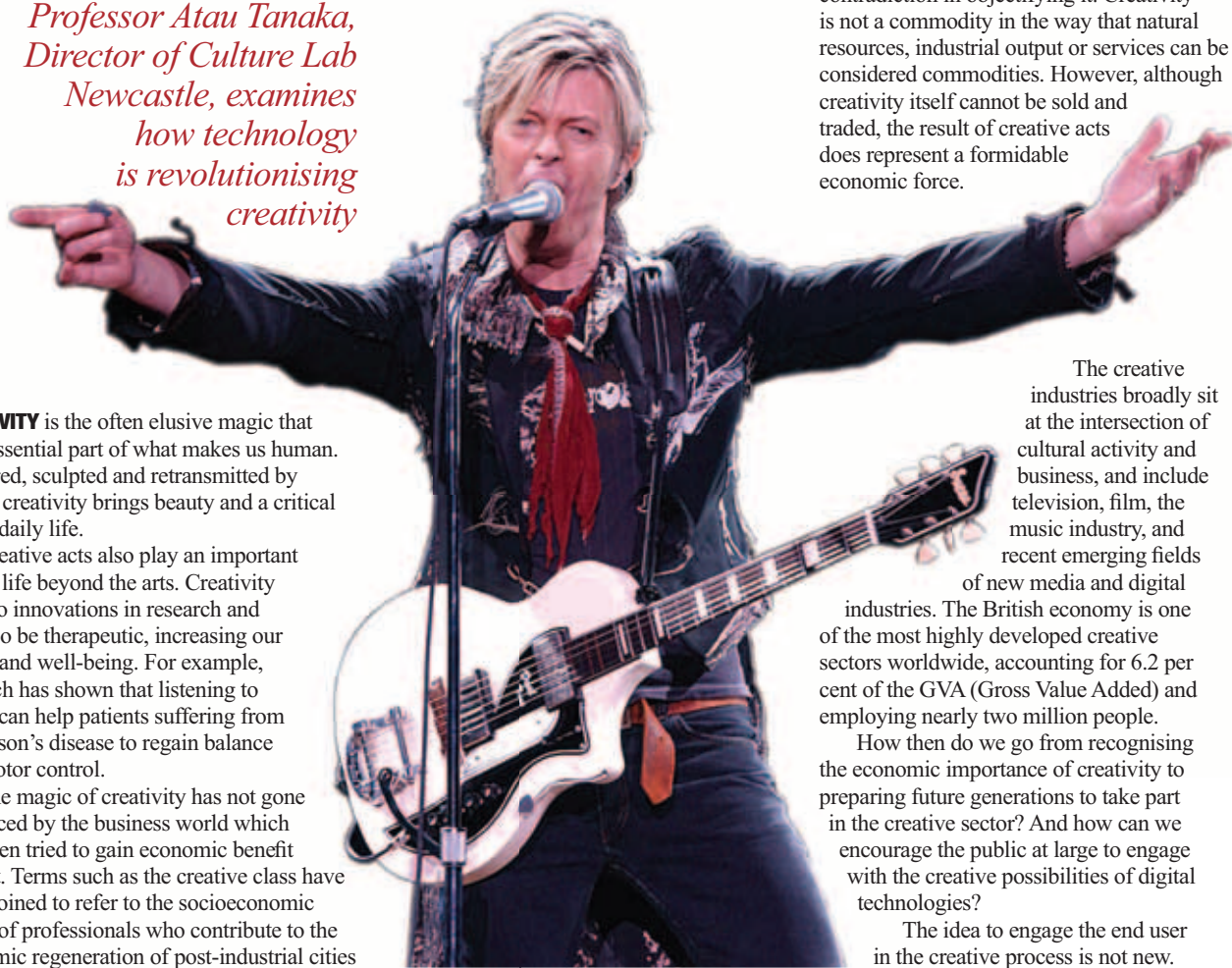
Go with the creative Flow

Professor Atau Tanaka, Director of Culture Lab Newcastle, examines how technology is revolutionising creativity

CREATIVITY is the often elusive magic that is an essential part of what makes us human. Captured, sculpted and retransmitted by artists, creativity brings beauty and a critical eye to daily life.

Creative acts also play an important role in life beyond the arts. Creativity leads to innovations in research and can also be therapeutic, increasing our health and well-being. For example, research has shown that listening to music can help patients suffering from Parkinson's disease to regain balance and motor control.

The magic of creativity has not gone unnoticed by the business world which has often tried to gain economic benefit from it. Terms such as the creative class have been coined to refer to the socioeconomic sector of professionals who contribute to the economic regeneration of post-industrial cities



Getty

by buying industrial properties, renovating them as living spaces and paving the way for mainstream populations to follow.

In the same way, terms such as the experience economy categorise creativity and creative output as elements of a post-service era economy where a monetary value is placed on lived experience.

While it is important to recognise the value of creativity, there is a fundamental contradiction in objectifying it. Creativity is not a commodity in the way that natural resources, industrial output or services can be considered commodities. However, although creativity itself cannot be sold and traded, the result of creative acts does represent a formidable economic force.

The creative industries broadly sit at the intersection of cultural activity and business, and include television, film, the music industry, and recent emerging fields of new media and digital industries. The British economy is one of the most highly developed creative sectors worldwide, accounting for 6.2 per cent of the GVA (Gross Value Added) and employing nearly two million people.

How then do we go from recognising the economic importance of creativity to preparing future generations to take part in the creative sector? And how can we encourage the public at large to engage with the creative possibilities of digital technologies?

The idea to engage the end user in the creative process is not new.

Navigating the moral maze of embryo science

Should demand for donor eggs be satisfied?

DR JOAN HARAN at the ESRC Centre for Economic and Social Aspects of Genomics has been researching media representations of embryo science in Britain since 2004. Central to both embryonic stem cell research and infertility treatment, embryology has been consistently newsworthy over the last decade.

In March 2010, a London-based fertility clinic was the subject of Radio 4's live debating programme *Moral Maze* when it offered a

donated human egg and a free cycle of IVF as a raffle prize. The controversial contest was open to potential clients who attended a promotional seminar for a prominent US genetic profiling and fertility clinic; this international collaboration appears to have been a way to circumvent the regulation to which infertility treatment is subject in Britain under the terms of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act (HFEA) 2008.

The existence of such collaborations, the media storm they create and an alleged surge in fertility tourism are used to justify calls for an increase in compensation for the provision of donor eggs in Britain by those who believe this is the way to tackle their scarcity.

Despite its planned demise, the HFEA is to conduct a public consultation on its policies relating to donation of eggs, embryos and sperm in early 2011. In spite of a press statement which claims that 'the Authority has not made any decisions about which options to undertake consultation on', the policy review is understood to be considering whether to increase the 'compensation' paid to egg donors.

Indeed an unnamed spokesman for the HFEA was quoted in the *Daily Mail*

Manifestos and calls to action for mass participation in culture date back to radical Situationist politics of the 1960s. In the 1990s the arrival of multimedia encouraged a first generation of products including interactive music CD-ROMs by well-known musicians like Peter Gabriel and David Bowie. There was something compelling in the concept of an interactive rock album CD which made listening an active process.

With multimedia came an invitation for the consumer to become creator, and in so doing, began to democratise creativity. Ultimately all these products had limited success – it was questionable what was really being created and whether at the end of the day the consumer wanted to be creator at all.

This highlights the important distinction between creator as a role and being creative as a quality. Focusing directly on creation and actively encouraging creative output can ultimately inhibit creativity because it can make people feel uneasy or out of their depth.

This can be explained by the notion of Flow, proposed by Mihály Csikszentmihályi, that plots skill versus challenge. The state of Flow is defined as the zone in which the mastery of a task is balanced with the level of challenge. If a task is too easy, people get bored; if a task is too difficult, people become anxious about their ability to accomplish it. The state of Flow occurs when people are locked into a productive upward spiral of challenge and reward, finding inspiration and feeling creative.

Advances in digital technologies combined with the democratisation of interaction techniques can create Flow and therefore creativity. Research carried out ten years ago in areas such as embodied interaction, sensor-based musical instruments and collaborative systems are implemented today in consumer technology. But the multi-touch screens and tilt sensors on today's mobile phones do a lot more than just rotate photos: they can capture gesture and



Today, young people do not need recording studios full of equipment to create. They can do it with their home computer or mobile device

map movement to produce sound and image.

At the same time there is a high level of familiarity and interaction with these technologies and a desire for them that is fuelled by consumer culture. Although the iPod is an iconic symbol for the consumption of music, the actual technology carries a far greater potential. The challenge is not to engineer more powerful technologies but to find compelling cultural contexts for existing technology. For example, free software such as RJDJ transforms the iPhone from being a device for the consumption of MP3 files to a synthesiser that generates musical streams that are context-sensitive, personalised, and 'reactive', becoming an expressive extension of the user.

The challenge is to find compelling cultural contexts for existing technology

We can harness the avid interest in technology amongst young people to raise awareness of the creative process. Partnerships between Research Councils UK-funded projects like Social Inclusion through the Digital Economy (SiDE) – taking place at Culture Lab and cultural sector outreach organisations like Generator Music – have created workshops for young people that bring interactive

technologies out of the lab and into the wild. They make innovative use of everyday objects to create social and creative situations so that, for example, moving one's finger across the touchscreen on an image of a turntable scratches the music and tilting the device from side to side slows down or speeds up the tempo.

This is just the starting point into more sophisticated forms of interaction with sound that borrow techniques from traditions of electro-acoustic music and apply them to the young person's popular music. Participants are not only more aware of the creative potential of digital technology but also become more sophisticated consumers, gaining an increased appreciation of the arts, and ultimately learning employable skills that are valued in the creative industries.

More important, young people from all walks of life gain self-esteem and a sense of empowerment that leads to participation in the advancement of society. To mobilise creative acts that enhance well-being in this way creates a compelling form of social innovation. ■

www.ncl.ac.uk/culturelab
www.rcukdigitaleconomy.org.uk



The importance of embryo science means that it is rarely out of the news

as speculating about whether it might be appropriate to increase monetary compensation to the level of benefits in kind – said to be worth several thousand pounds – received by women who 'share' their eggs in exchange for free or discounted fertility treatment.

One of the key arguments raised in support of such an increase is the risk to the health – and potential knock-on costs to the NHS – of British women who travel abroad for fertility treatment to countries where it is easier to obtain donor eggs. By increasing the compensation to British donors, the argument goes, these health risks will be minimised.

Less consideration is extended to the overseas egg donors who may be risking

their health to donate eggs for more affluent women. Important issues which need to be addressed include whether positioning the limited supply of eggs for infertility treatment as a question of consumer – and indeed producer – choice limits serious debate about the commodification of reproduction and the potential harms to donors and their offspring.

Further, will a focus on the 'choice' of women to donate eggs, for the benefit of infertile women or couples, obscure the professional and financial interests of the infertility clinics – the key beneficiaries of this donation or trade? ■

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Containing a crisis

What can the Deepwater Horizon oil spill teach us about managing damage to reputation?

MEMORIES OF 'STATIC KILL', 'top kill', 'junk shot' and 'top hat' attempts to stem the oil-flow into the Gulf of Mexico may be receding, but the Deepwater Horizon oil spill raises several key challenges for risk regulation and management, not least as other jurisdictions embark on even more complex deep water offshore drilling exercises.

The consequences of the three month-long attempt to contain the oil spill, apart from the tragic loss of life and the economic and ecological impact, will be felt for a long time. Yet the implications of Deepwater Horizon go far beyond the oil industry and the world's dependency on oil itself; they point to the manner in which events can give rise to contagion effects which cut across regulatory systems – something which was also evident in the recent global financial crisis.

Conventional wisdom suggests that successful responses to such crises are marked by three key elements. However the Deepwater Horizon incident points to the inherent limitations of these orthodoxies.

First, the widely held view that risk communication is key in successfully dealing with such emergencies is challenged by the Deepwater Horizon experience. Studies of accidents in highly complex industries that deal with considerable uncertainty highlight the problems that emerge when errors are tolerated and deviations from agreed norms become accepted and amplified. History provides many instances where warning signals were ignored or overridden, and where professional judgement and communication was biased towards the view that things cannot fail.

Deepwater Horizon points to the inability of even the most well-trained corporate reputation management machine to successfully respond to political and media attacks. When things go wrong, industry – especially when it involves a chain of fragmented contractors and sub-contractors as in the case of Deepwater Horizon – will not unite and share expertise, but is likely to distance itself, hoping to avoid any blame and liability. Indeed, in a hostile political environment that demands certainty and quick responses, risk communication turns into an impossible job. As we all saw, when a highly complex technology goes wrong, it is not easy to fix.

The second widely held view, namely that redundancy matters, has also been challenged. Unsurprisingly, the immediate industry response has been to place a greater



Rex

Media coverage of the oil spill highlighted the difficulty of crisis communication

emphasis on learning systems and on enhanced, de-centralised resources to cope more quickly with the implications of a major accident. Promises have been made to provide more autonomous units within the industry to offer enhanced long-term planning and capacity to develop alternative plans for action.

Yet although redundancy has been a long-established recipe to provide for resilience, it comes at a considerable cost. At a time when governments, regulators and shareholders are demanding greater cost-efficiency, debates arise about how much redundancy is necessary and through which mechanisms.

The third widely held view that risk regulation matters has also unravelled. One of the first responses to Deepwater Horizon in the US was the renaming of the disgraced Minerals Management Service as the 'Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement'. Along with other organisational reforms, this sought to deal with, at least temporarily, the often-diagnosed problem of 'regulatory capture' via revolving doors, cosy relationships, gift-giving and the completion of safety-critical documentation by industry workers rather than inspectors. However, the wider unresolved question is how to combine demands for strict and error-intolerant oversight with continuous pressures for 'light touch' and 'industry-friendly' regulatory interaction.

Deepwater Horizon has therefore shown the limitations of the three standard responses

to disaster: better communication, more redundancy and better risk management. The accident also points to further key conundrums affecting risk regulation in contemporary economic and political life.

One is the contagion effect of major accidents and events in complex industries. As the political temperature in the US rose, markets reacted and BP holdings in the pension funds of millions of people became devalued, creating an unexpected kind of solidarity with the fishermen of Louisiana. Or, in the case of the banking crisis, the solvency of individual banks became a problem for the solvency of nations and subsequently a problem of personal solvency for citizens. Indeed, many societies experienced a form of shock at the realisation that large institutions like banks are not autonomous entities, but are deeply embedded in society (as economic sociologists have always maintained).

These examples call for greater attention to the inherently complex connections in contemporary market societies in which failure and regulatory responses in one industry have repercussions for the economic and social well-being of citizens in other countries and economic sectors. Such interdependencies between sectors – and dependency on the well-being of key industrial sectors – point to the inherent limitations of any single regulator or regulatory strategy, and to the need for regulatory networks to somehow mirror the interconnectivities of the regulated domains.

Deepwater Horizon raises a wider conundrum. As society remains structurally

In a hostile political environment risk communication turns into an impossible job

dependent on cheap oil, it necessarily relies on increasingly risky drilling activities. Yet at the same time, many elements of society are both sceptical about the interests of major industries and also intolerant and precautionary regarding potential major disaster. So the debate about future energy portfolios must confront the problem of communicating trade-offs to a risk-intolerant media and political system, and must make clear the choices between the cheap availability of highly risky energy sources and the potential unpalatable consequences any particular choice might incur.

Finally, one of the key debates in risk management has been the extent to which it is possible to create and maintain 'high reliability organisations'. These are organisations that sustain an error-intolerant organisational culture that, against the odds, succeeds in avoiding major accidents.

The standard recipe for achieving high reliability is an organisational pre-occupation with, and institutionalised curiosity about, failure. This involves the constant challenging of information, an organisational commitment to resilience, and the empowerment of professional judgement. Emphasising these methods is said to mitigate the likelihood of a 'normal accident' having major disastrous consequences.

However, whether such strategies are actually capable of avoiding major disasters in international and fragmented industries remains a major question. Indeed, it also raises a further question about whether regulators have the ability to impose such systems in an age of financial austerity and likely industry mobility to 'light touch' jurisdictions.

The wider implication of Deepwater Horizon is therefore not to raise the politically undesirable question as to which kind of complex technologies society wishes to tolerate. It raises the even more troubling question as to whether there are some highly risky and complex industries upon which modern society has become ever-dependent, therefore having to live with ever growing risks of failure and disaster. ■

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Big Brother, which finished in Britain in 2010, has been a prime time hit in over 70 countries

Why pay if you can copy for free?

How production companies can protect their formats

THE EXPORTING OF TV formats has fast become a multi-billion pound business – but how is this being made possible? Media and copyright experts at Bournemouth University uncover the trade secrets.

Television formats, such as *Big Brother*, *The Apprentice*, *The X-Factor* or *Britain's Got Talent* are extremely popular with audiences. Over the last decade, Britain has emerged as the world's major format developer, accounting for about one third of all format hours broadcast annually worldwide.

Yet there is no such thing as a television format right under copyright law. Any producer is free to develop game, reality and talent shows that are based on similar ideas. In the 1990s, the industry worried: 'If no such rights exist, then the commercial rate for the format, at least from a legal point of view, is zero' (*The Times* Law Page, March 1999).

How then could format developers such as Endemol or FremantleMedia become multinational companies, producing and licensing their programmes around the globe? For example, Fremantle's *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* format has been broadcast in over 100 territories and local versions of *Idols* have aired in 42 territories, receiving about three billion votes.

Recent ESRC-funded research by Professor Martin Kretschmer, Dr Sukhpreet Singh and Jonathan Wardle of Bournemouth University created a database of 59 reported format disputes between 1988 (when the issue of TV format rights first surfaced in the landmark legal case of Green vs Broadcasting Corporation of New

Zealand) and 2008. The researchers then conducted interviews with media sellers and buyers at three international television trade fairs (NATPE Las Vegas, DISCOP Budapest and ATF Singapore). Finally, patterns of exploitation were specified through three case studies of successful television formats developed by FremantleMedia: *Idols*, *Got Talent* and *Hole in the Wall*. FremantleMedia co-funded the research through the ESRC's Business Placement Scheme.

The research found that format developers formalise and sell know-how which cannot be easily extracted from watching the show. This may include how to

source contestants and organise audience participation, as well as specific production elements. The format is codified in a so-called 'production bible', supplied under confidentiality agreements and licences. Case studies provide a real insight into the industry's 'flying producer' system – sending a producer to other countries for

six weeks to help the on-the-ground team establish the show in that country.

The formats industry is only young, yet its set of strategies should have wide application for creative industries operating in digital markets where copying is easy. The results of the research, including numerous video interviews, have been made available as a digital resource by Bournemouth University and the site has already received more than 5,000 visits from 100 countries. The research has also been positively received by FremantleMedia. ■

Over the last decade, Britain has emerged as the world's major TV format developer

tvformats.bournemouth.ac.uk



Britain became a major exporter of music in the 1960s with bands such as the Rolling Stones and the Beatles

Where creativity meets commerce

Exploring the complex world of talent and opportunity

THE BRITISH POPULAR music business is going through a period of uncertainty as new technologies and patterns of consumption transform the global marketplace. That British pop music retains the global presence it does is in itself a remarkable story.

From the perspective of the 1950s, it seemed that music might go the way of other entertainment industries, swallowed up by US corporations and US culture. In the event, from the 1950s to the 1970s a range of British enterprises kept the music alive, and more than this, turned British music into a global, cultural and economic force.

British music has become a global, cultural and economic force

In the ESRC-funded project Enterprise and Creativity: The British Popular Music Industry 1950-1975, currently underway at the Business History Unit at the London

School of Economics, Dr Richard Coopey and Dr Terry Gourvish are examining the development of enterprise in the sector. It is a diverse story of major multinationals like EMI and Decca, new technologies such as the multi-track studio

and the vinyl record, radical entrepreneurship in the midst of the cultural upheavals of the 1960s, and above all it's a story of the way in which music meets the market, how

creativity is generated and harnessed to commercial power.

The pop business is often caricatured as a world of rip-offs, where contracts are tested and where the word 'corporate' takes on a whole new pejorative meaning for many artists. But what is the reality? It is a complex world of talent and opportunity, of dogged determination and flair, of success and failure. It's a world of corporate hierarchies and inspired individualism, of networks local, national and international. It's rock 'n' roll and the Singing Postman.

There is a great deal written about the industry, but hyperbole and ego frequently mask the true account of the evolution of the business into its modern form. Through in-depth interviews, archives, and a wide range of contemporary media, the project aims to get to the heart of entrepreneurship – where creativity meets commerce – to chart the networks and dynamics of pop, and show how an understanding of culture is crucial to an understanding of business history. ■

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