'Mobile Internet's "Creative Destruction":
Implications for Global Mobile Policy'

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Introduction

Deeply imbricated in the current economic crisis, and the concomitant reshaping of its geo-political and communication orders, is the media convergence entailed in mobile Internet.

Not simply a joining of mobiles and telecommunications with the Internet, mobile Internet now spans a complex assembly of emergent, hybrid media forms — from smartphones, tablets, and the apps phenomena, through new televisual ecologies and locative media, to pervasive computers and smart cities.

The Internet and other digital networks have underpinned the dynamics of the current economic crisis in a direct sense, as the globalisation literatures have for some time pointed out: namely, that digital networks made possible the velocitous, dizzying flows of information, transactions, and actions that now characterize the banking and financial institutions.

Much of the diverse forms of resistance and protest in response to the current crisis have centred on mobile Internet, whether the *indignatos* in Spain, the Occupy movement, and protests in Greece. Elsewhere other movements not immediately surging up in response to the economic crisis, but rather into particular clusters of democratic crises have also relied upon mobile Internet – such as the uprising centring on Turkey's Taksim square, Brazil massive protests concerning public transportation and government spending on the World Cup, India's protests against corruption and sexual violence, and before these, the various movements in the Arab uprising.

In response, governments have sought to harvest the capabilities of social, mobile media, for purposes of surveillance and repression – as revealed in the case of Iranian government response to the Green Revolution, and, more recently, the revelations of former CIA IT consultant Edward Snowden concerning the state's gathering of massive amounts of data in North America, the UK, Australia, and else where.

Those interested in global media policy are well aware of the ways in which both the Internet and mobile phones represent transformations in global power and communication order, reaching back to at least the 1970s – notably, to do with privatization and deregulation of telecommunications, the rise of computers and data networks, the introduction mobile phone in the early 1980s and emergence of mobile media in the early twentieth-first century. The political and cultural economies of these histories of Internet and mobile phones, and their social imaginaries are important to remember, as Robin Mansell has laid out in her recent book *Imagining the Internet* (Mansell, 2012) when we consider how these technologies fit into – if not, substantially underpin, global media and contemporary societies today.

For sometime those interested in policy, its conceptualization and institutional, and its articulates into larger formations of power, have studied the new area of Internet governance – the thematic of this panel.

One key challenge we face as citizens, policy-makers, and researchers, is develop, democratize, and open-up Internet governance and policy to discussion, deliberation, and debate by the very large publics now interested in it. The intense world-wide interest among users in intellectual property and copyright laws is notable here, because new forms of sharing are core to contemporary mobile and social media – yet such counter-publics and their user cultures, visions, and values are not well recognized in media policy.

Another longstanding challenge is the conventional and important project of forging coherent connections needed between Internet and other aspects of media policy (whether broadcasting, press, or telecommunications).

These are two facets of a much larger need to rethink global media policy in light of the 'creative destruction' underway. To cast some light on the scope, scale, and stakes involved, our paper draws on research-in-progress in the protean area of mobile Internet.

Moving Media Project

Based in the Department of Media and Communications, at the University of Sydney, we are undertaking a three year study mapping and theorizing the responses of policy institutions and actors to the range of forms of mobile Internet and the new kinds of governance they are eliciting.

Entitled *Moving Media: Mobile Internet and New Policy Modes*, our study is funded by the Australian Research Council, and we engage with the IAMCR *Mapping Global Media Policy* database, where we have established a mobile Internet policy section (or island).

In brief, in our understanding mobile Internet expands the concept of media, hybridizing telecommunications, traditional media (press, broadcasting), and new media (online, mobile) to embrace a wide range of technologies and settings. Not simply a straightforward meeting of the Internet and mobile phone — as it was imagined in the late 1990s with the wireless access protocol (WAP) technology — mobile Internet is complex assemblage of media forms, technologies, and cultures.

The rise of the mobile Internet involves convergence between the broadband Internet and other media technology along at least three major axes: (1) with mobile telephony and telecommunications; (2) digital television broadcasting; and (3) with the new media ecologies evolving around locative, spatial/mapping, and sensing technologies. To this list, we could add a fourth axis, the convergence between different systems of mobilities – notably, communicative mobilities associated with mobile and online media, creating new seams and conjunctions with systems of mobilities such automobilities.

In our study, the kinds of issues we are interested include longstanding media policy concerns such as news diversity, consumer issues, public interest, and citizen participation, as well as new issues such as openness of platforms and understanding the commons in mobile Internet.

Particular case studies include:

- news on smartphones, tablets, and other mobile Internet platforms;

- television and mobile Internet technologies;
- health apps;
- locative media;
- mobile Internet in cars.

Our approach draws upon policy and archival documents, participation-observation in industry and policy fora, and interviews. As far as possible, we seek to understand the international specificities of mobile Internet, and our case studies will draw on research in a range of different countries, including Australia, Hong Kong, China, South Korea, UK, US, Mexico, South Africa, and India. We will use the Global Media Policy database to categorize, analyze, and visual information, making it available to other researchers. Because of the emergent nature of mobile Internet as media policy, there is little visibility of areas like health apps, or mobile Internet in cars, in traditional policy and regulatory discourse and institutions. Accordingly, we are also experimenting with Twitter analysis of discourse and networks associated with these new areas of mobile Internet to map how policy takes shape.

New Actors from Mobile Internet

The areas of health apps, locative media, and mobile Internet in cars are clearly novel (while drawing on earlier technologies, uses, and histories). They are new forms of *media* – in that, until recently, it was not common to think of GPS or satnav as media. Similarly to such locative media, health technologies, health informatics, and quantitative data have all been with us for sometime, but only in the last few years have these coalesced in the form of health apps – with distinctive, significant implications for the role of such media in everyday life. It still is likely thought odd to consider cars as media – despite the work of Harold Innes, and many other communication and media scholars on large-scale technological and transportation systems and infrastructures.

Each of the major player in these new areas is unlikely to be represented in, interpellated by, or find itself involved in traditional national or global media policy. Given the global scale and aspirations of some of these players, this can only surely be a matter of time.

Most obvious new actors in global media policy include Facebook, which ported its software to mobile platforms over a decade ago, has been a highly visible player in various debates, yet has resisted a full immersion in regulatory arena. For its part, Google, in many jurisdictions has cultivated a presence in media policy arena – often funding research, and researchers, that share its broad orientation to stave off regulation in the name of Internet freedom. Others actors, even household names, are responsible for technologies and affordances, whose appropriation is reshaping our very sense of global media – yet still are not well incorporated into, or thought through in terms of global media policy. An obvious example is Apple, which has been reluctant to engage in media policy deliberations in public fora.

If we consider the emergence area of mobile, locative media, Twitter, for instance, as Rowan Wilken and Gerard Goggin have recently noted, has not usually been thought of a locative platform — however it now clearly is. Wilken & Goggin note that:

> Twitter developed geotagging capabilities to encourage a richer user experience and more contextually relevant, finely granulated data. One of the

> key means by which Twitter both encourages location disclosure and accesses this information is via their subscribers' use of third party applications interacting with the Twitter interface. (Wilken & Goggin, 2013)

Foursquare, on the other hand, has been a pin-up child for the emergence of locative, mobile media in North America especially. It has kept its API accessible to allow partners such as Instagram to provide location-based data (Wilken & Goggin, 2013).

We still know relatively little about the constitution of locative media, especially in understanding how its affordances and uses, are connected to its social imaginaries, and in turn its political and cultural economies – let alone how such actors attach to, adapt, and seek to exert influence upon global media policy.

Yet, based on our preliminary work, we would suggest that such actors are an increasingly important part of the evolving global media policy landscape which the IAMCR Mapping project seeks to map. In their seminal 2010 paper, Marc Raboy and Claudia Padovani characterize this emergent policy ecology as being characterized by the logic by which 'what used to be multilateral arrangements amongst state actors, has now turned into a highly complex landscape, where states and intergovernmental institutions share the stage with private corporations, standard setting entities, civil society organizations, epistemic and technical communities' (Raboy and Padovani, 2010: 15).

For the likes of Foursquare, Twitter, Facebook, and apps developers, the starting point typically assumed is the obverse: private corporations, start-ups, commercial and social entrepreneurs, software developers, scientists, public health advocates, and NGOs seek to create a new stage, or theatre of immanent media, in which states and intergovernment and supranational organization media policy lies in the wing, if acknowledged at all.

The pitfalls with this situation can be seen in the area of personal data. Media organizations' collection of personal information and data is a well-established regulatory issue. These frameworks are under increasing strain from the phenomenal intensification of personal and real-time data collection at the heart of locational technologies, which span online, mobile, and social media technologies. It is clear that these technologies and the cultures of use associated with them are resulting in what we might think of as pervasive, new informational 'ecologies'. These ecologies or cultural environments are raising new issues about privacy, use, and the disclosure of user location information.

Traditional media and communications regulators have not been especially well positioned to grasp and respond to privacy concerns involving these new kinds of media arrangements, having focussed more on threats to citizens from states – rather than corporations. Now there is an additional demand for an adequate response because of the scale, influence, and pervasiveness of Internet media entities such as Google and weibo. These dominate contemporary media landscapes but are only partially, at best, covered by existing national privacy protections and may be slow to respond to requests to delete data or to address potential breaches of codes or laws.

If reconceptualising and extending privacy protections to the contemporary mobile Internet is only now seriously commencing, the countervailing issue of access to these ecologies and infrastructures is even more benighted. Currently, media companies are rolling out locative media technologies commercially on a mass scale without any

debate about what rights citizens and users might have to use these infrastructures or what their informational 'commons' aspects might be. This is a considerable irony. Users are being strongly encouraged, if not compelled, to share their locational information; indeed, such sharing of user data, like user-generated content generally, makes locative media possible. Yet other, more radical kinds of sharing of information, such as P2P and mesh networks, which individuals or groups of users initiate, are not being contemplated.

While presenting themselves in new ways, data and location information are probably more familiar than health apps — an area in which Fiona Martin and Jonathon Hutchinson have been working. As Fiona noted in her paper on smartphone health apps given at IAMCR 2013, the growth of the mhealth apps industry comes about as a response to crisis in healthcare funding in industrialised countries and looks to shift costs of monitoring, reportring and managing health care to patients. Fiona notes that this re-orientation of health policy to everyday delivery of healthcare via media services and products and communications networks has seen a convergence of health, information, communications and media policy concerns — around digital citizenship (information literacy, data protection) and media content regulation (advertising, content classification, speech laws). She suggests that governments have been reluctant to regulate the developing industry on an innovation and economic policy basis, leaving largely US based apps store providers as defacto corporate regulators.

Conclusion

Mobile Internet is an important site of contemporary media, social, and political transformations — in the vanguard of how our present crises are to be worked through. While we are only at the early stage of our project into mobile Internet and its policy modes, this paper aims to encapsulate our early insights.

In particular, we would emphasize the need to:

- understand what mobile Internet actually is, does, and means as media – as this is by no means straightforward;
- map and theorize the discourses, actors, and modes by which different forms of mobile Internet are beginning to appear in global media policy.

We would suggest that there are early signs that mobile Internet appears to profoundly expand the domains and modes of policy-making, the actors involved, and the processes of public engagement and deliberation. As such, the conceptual framework, scholarly group, methods, and infrastructure developed by this IAMCR Working Group over the last few years are a prescient and invaluable resource for undertaking the necessary research and debate into what mobile Internet represents and portends.

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