



Life storytelling at the ABC: *Challenges of ‘giving the audience a voice’ in the context of public service media*

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ABSTRACT

Life storytelling projects have become an important means through which public service media institutions such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation are seeking to foster audience participation and involve particular cohorts in the creation and distribution of broadcast content. This paper contributes to the wider conversation on audience participation within public service media intuitions (PSMs), and focuses on the opportunities and challenges that arise within life storytelling projects that are facilitated by these institutions, and that aim to ‘give voice’ to members of ‘the audience’. In particular, it focuses on two of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s current life storytelling projects: ABC Open and Heywire.

Keywords: Public Service Media, Heywire, ABC Open, Life Storytelling, Social Learning, Digital Literacy, User-created content.

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Introduction

In recent years there has been a noticeable move by public service media institutions to facilitate voice through inviting members of 'the audience' to use digital technologies for the creation and sharing of personal stories. Life storytelling projects have become prevalent in the context of public service media (PSM) as these institutions respond to technological developments and changing patterns of media production and consumption. In a fully digitised, convergent media environment PSMs such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) are increasingly prioritising audience participation and privileging user-created content. This paper seeks to contribute to wider conversations about evolving practices of audience participation in the PSM context by examining two instances of these practices at the ABC in which the broadcaster invites self-representational storytelling from specific cohorts of its audience. Both these projects seek to facilitate voice through personal storytelling, and hence they adhere somewhat to the principles and practices of digital storytelling. We address the use of the principles of digital storytelling in the PSM context, discussing the value of life storytelling projects for the ABC, as well as the challenges in managing and sustaining them. While the invitation to share stories digitally represents an effective means for involving the audience as creators of broadcast content, challenges are inevitable as the PSM endeavours to mediate a number of competing objectives, such as those of the people to whom it seeks to 'give voice', along with the broader aims and obligations of the institution.

The two case studies discussed in this paper are ABC Open and Heywire, both current projects at the ABC that encourage participation from rural and regional Australians, and on which little academic scholarship exists. Through observation and analysis of the websites of the ABC Open and Heywire projects and a series of interviews with the facilitators and participants, we investigate the objectives that underpin these projects and consider their importance to the ABC. It is clear that projects such as ABC Open and Heywire embody the ABC's current priorities around digital media and audience

involvement, and they are centrally important to how the ABC fulfils its public service remit in the contemporary media landscape; however, it is also clear that involving members of the audience as participants in the creation of broadcast content is challenging for the institution. The challenge for the ABC is ensuring the project is useful to the institution as well as to the members of the audience whose personal stories and voices it seeks to amplify.



HEYWIRE IS...

young regional Australians telling it like it is and making a difference



Figure 1: Heywire website homepage.

<http://www.abc.net.au/heywire/>

Heywire

Heywire is an ABC Radio project and nation-wide storytelling competition for 16-22 year olds who live in rural and regional parts of Australia. The ABC provides a website (see Figure 1, and <http://abc.net.au/heywire>) and invites young people from non-metropolitan areas to contribute short, personal narratives about their lives, in which they describe what life in rural, regional or remote Australia is like for them, and express their views on subjects that are important to them. Young people use a variety of media to tell their stories, including audio, video, photography as well as text-based narratives. These narratives vary in tone and style—some are similar to personal essays, while others are

based on anecdotes and memories—yet they are in general characterised by their sincerity, warmth, and the simplicity of their telling.

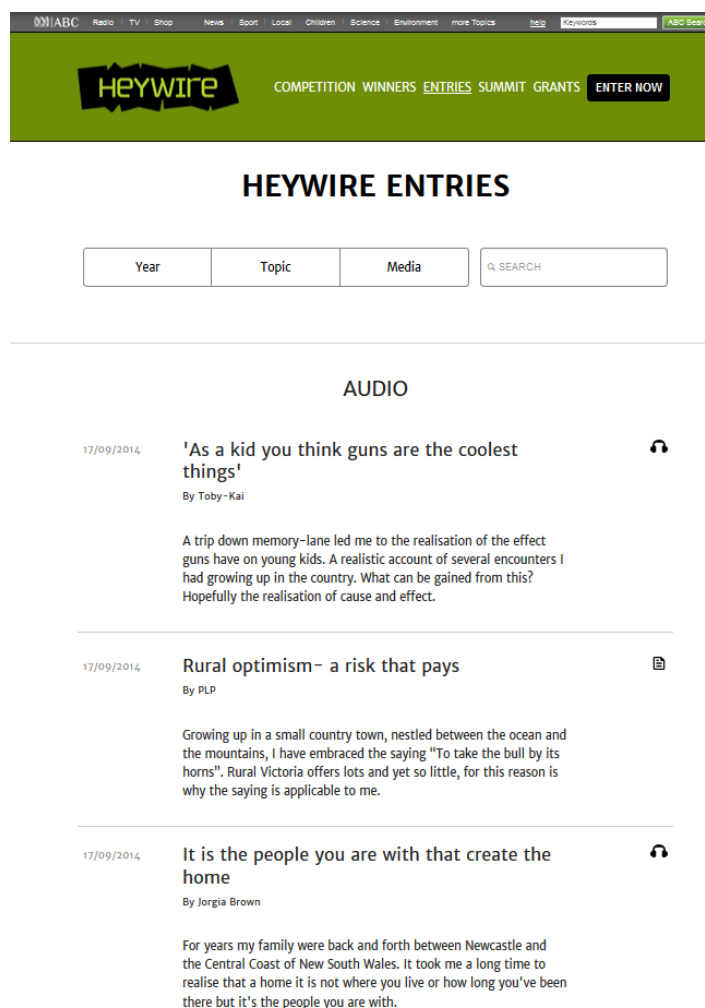


Figure 2: Young people's Heywire stories, listed on the website in order of upload.
<http://www.abc.net.au/heywire/entries/>

Every year, one story from each of ABC Local Radio's regional stations is chosen as a winning entry, then produced as a radio feature and broadcast throughout rural and regional Australia. Between 35 and 40 winners are selected each year and these storytellers receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Canberra for the 'Heywire Regional Youth Summit', during which they develop proposals for creating positive change in rural and regional areas and pitch these to Federal Ministers and Members of Parliament (Heywire 2014). Dan Hirst, Executive Producer for Heywire since 2010, describes the project as "a platform for the stories and ideas of young people of rural, remote and regional Australia", the aim of which is to "give voice" to this group both on the ABC and within Parliament House (interview, October 2012).

Established in 1998, Heywire is one of the longest-running initiatives in which the ABC invites participation from members of its public. Since 1998, over 9,000 young people have submitted stories to the Heywire competition, and nearly 600 storytellers have attended the Canberra Summit (Heywire 2014). The project has changed over the years as the ABC has incorporated a website along with other new, digital technologies into Heywire, and new producers have brought different styles of management. Yet the key objective to provide young people with an opportunity to have their ideas and opinions more widely ‘heard’ has remained central (McSweeney, interview, 2012).

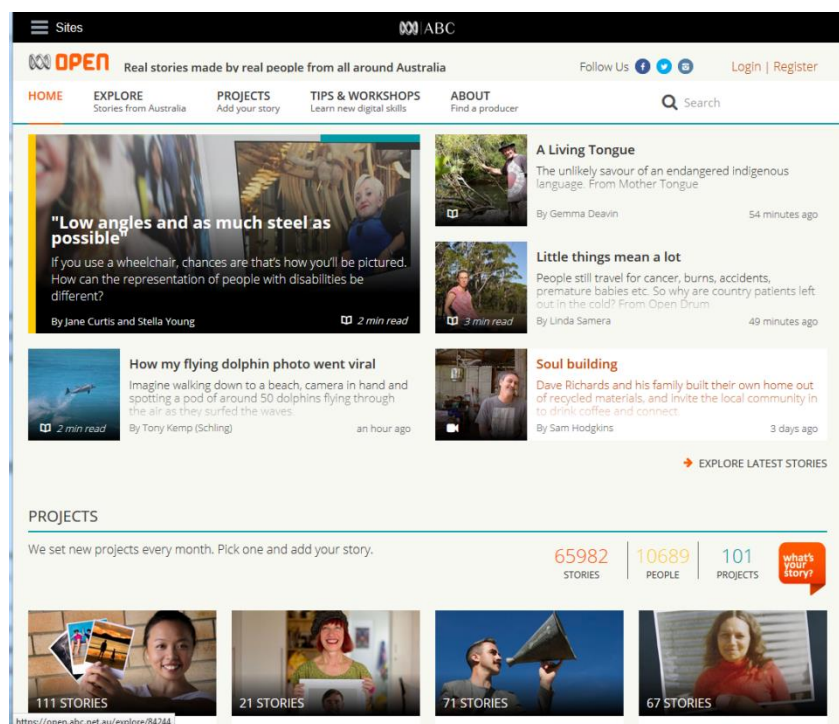


Figure 3: ABC Open homepage. <https://open.abc.net.au/>

ABC Open

ABC Open is a community participation project that aims to engage rural and regional Australians in participatory media by providing facilitation and support for them to share their stories nationally on the ABC website and on the digital television station ABC 24. The website for this project is shown in Figure 3. The initiative has 45 producers across all of the ABC’s regional stations who facilitate workshops throughout regional Australia in digital storytelling, short story writing, photography, and general short documentary production. These stories are distributed across several of the ABC’s broadcast and content distribution platforms. As the mission statement for ABC Open states:

We all know the media is changing, with more and more people making their own videos, writing stories and sharing photos and ideas through social media. ABC Open is an exciting initiative which provides a focal point for Australian regional communities who want to get involved in sharing their experiences through the ABC via websites, radio and TV (ABC 2012).

This simple statement suggests that the ABC is aware of the influence of informally or non-facilitated user-created content, but sees its role as assisting the learning of its audience in digital literacy skills and sharing their personal stories as a way that they themselves can still remain relevant in the changing media landscape. This is in addition to its contribution as a society wide learning institution to provide its audience with skills in which to interact and engage with the media institution and impart their personal knowledge to others via a national broadcaster's platform.

ABC Open also allows participants to make and contribute stories to the website in their own time, much like the approach taken in Heywire. It has a very flexible approach to submission, but often has themed sub-projects to which contributors can submit. Examples of these sub-projects include 'Unsung', a project about quiet achievers in the community; 'I am 18', a youth focused portrait series; and 'Mother Tongue', an indigenous language project on Australia's first languages (see Figure 4 or <https://open.abc.net.au/projects>). As of 8th of December 2014, ABC Open has received and produced 65, 997 contributions. Amongst those figures, it has involved the participation of 10, 689 people.

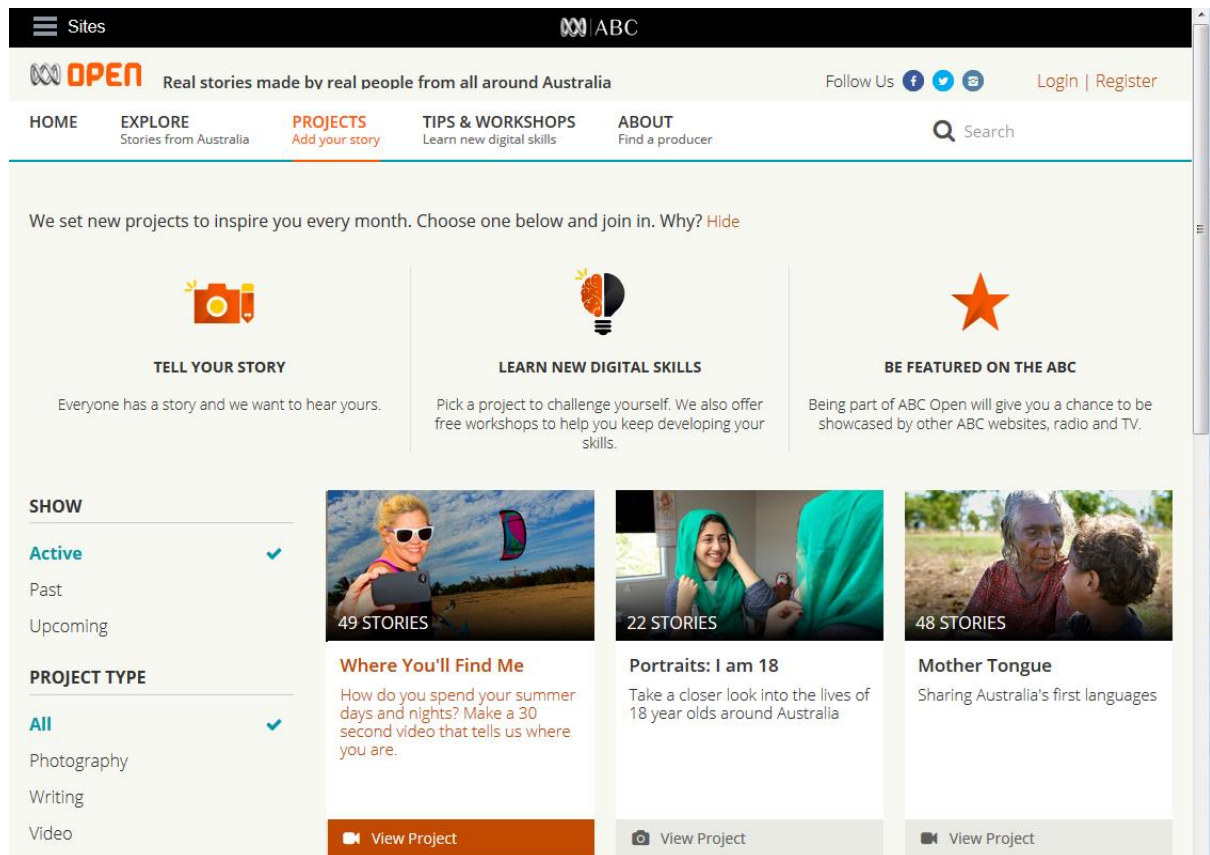


Figure 4: ABC Open project page.

<https://open.abc.net.au/projects?projectStatus=active&type=all&submissionType=all>

Life storytelling at the ABC

The narrative focus and the value placed on personal storytelling positions ABC Open and Heywire within a large and diverse field of initiatives that use digital technologies and narrative practices for engagement, of which digital storytelling is a particularly popular format. We align ABC Open and Heywire loosely with the digital storytelling ‘movement’ (Hartley and McWilliam 2009: 5) since we find both projects bear some semblance to this practice; however, in this paper, we prefer to use the term ‘life storytelling’, finding this broader phrase better encompasses the range of practices used to capture and disseminate personal narratives in the projects initiated by the ABC, as well as the variety of types of personal stories shared through them.

Following the work of many prominent researchers in the field, we use ‘digital storytelling’ to refer specifically to “a workshop-based process by which ‘ordinary people’ create their own short autobiographical films that can be streamed on the Web or broadcast on television” (Burgess 2006: 207). Further, Poletti (2011), referring to Lambert and the elements of digital storytelling developed by the Centre for Digital Storytelling in California, proposes digital storytelling is a distinct genre of autobiographical narrative, governed by a set of specific textual features and ‘rules’ (Poletti 2011: 77). While neither Heywire nor ABC Open are primarily workshop-based projects, and many of the stories

produced within them deviate from the generic features of digital stories as outlined by Poletti, these projects appear to have been implicitly influenced by the philosophy of the movement.

Many of the ABC's intentions for the life storytelling projects they facilitate reflect some of the broader principles of digital storytelling, such as the aim to "give voice to the myriad tales of everyday life as experienced by ordinary people in their own terms" (Hartley and McWilliam 2009: 3). According to Hirst, the model of storytelling and story sharing that digital storytelling presented was 'part of the dialogue' at the ABC during the time in which Heywire was initiated in the mid to late 1990s (Hirst, interview, 2014). Hirst stated that "still photographs with two to three minutes of voiceover makes for a really effective story, and it's a straightforward way for young people to be involved" (ibid). The ABC had clearly acknowledged that members of its audience could be engaged quite easily and effectively through inviting them to tell personal stories using materials that were readily available to them, such as personal photographs, combined with audio recordings of short anecdotes. Heywire emerged within this milieu.

Of course, as ABC-managed projects that invite self-representational storytelling from 'the audience', Heywire and ABC Open have a great deal in common with the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC's) two digital storytelling projects, Capture Wales and London's Voices, both of which have attracted a substantial amount of scholarly attention, and are now concluded. Some of the ABC's assertions about the Heywire project echo Meadows's (2003) hopes for digital storytelling at the BBC. Most prevalent are the ideas that by inviting people to share their personal stories, projects such as the BBC's Capture Wales and London's Voices, and the ABC's Heywire and Open, demonstrate a reshaping of traditional structures of voice and representation. As Meadows suggested of Capture Wales, "no longer must the public tolerate being 'done' by media" (2003: 192). There is the firm suggestion that through self-representational digital storytelling, the public may 'take the power back' (ibid). As was stated on the Heywire website:

Heywire provides a fantastic, innovative, safe and ready-made vehicle for youth to voice their concerns, issues, hopes and opinions about life in regional and rural Australia. This voice comes straight from the source, without being filtered through particular agendas, summarised in reports by journalists or simplified by media stereotyping (Heywire, 2011).

Heywire is presented as a way through which young, rural and regional people can represent their own lives, and thus challenge stereotypes and set the record straight. Meadows's aspirations for digital storytelling at the BBC and the ABC's claims about Heywire harken to claims that have been made about digital storytelling's democracy-enhancing potentials (Couldry 2008: 618; Thumim, 2009). This appears an important part of broadcasters' inviting and amplifying the voice of 'the audience'.

Despite these similarities and the overarching intention to facilitate the creation and sharing of digital life narratives, both ABC Open and Heywire diverge from the specific practices of digital storytelling, and the narratives produced them do not always include the generic features common to digital stories. For example, neither project adheres strictly to the workshop-based approach that is central to the practice of digital storytelling. Rather, both Heywire and ABC Open use a mixture of workshop based storytelling and acquired contribution. Furthermore, while digital stories tend to follow a narrative arc, have a protagonist whose needs, desires and realisations are clear to the audience, and provide a sense of closure (Poletti 2011: 77-78), the life narratives captured through the ABC's projects do not always include these distinctive elements. Heywire stories, in particular, are often fragmentary, episodic, and can lack closure or a distinct sense of an ending.

Another feature that differentiates ABC Open is that it is about teaching digital literacy skills to its regional participants using available consumer based technology, thus allowing these participants to acquire the skills as citizen journalists to continue to share stories from their communities. ABC Open's emphasis is on providing participants not only with a voice to share stories on the ABC broadcasting and distribution platforms, but also with long term digital literacy and production skills. Although the BBC's Capture Wales was similar in some regard by way of facilitating storytelling workshops for broadcast platforms, the contemporary media landscape has allowed more accessible technology such as smartphones and digital cameras to be available to ABC Open participants, and to learn the skills to maintain production once they have completed workshops to produce their own content in the user-created participatory media culture (Jenkins 2008: 5-10).

Thus, as the term digital storytelling refers to a very specific kind of story and storytelling practice, we favour the broader term life storytelling when describing the range of life narratives that ABC Open and Heywire comprise. While we find many similarities between life stories and digital stories and frequently refer to these throughout this paper, by writing 'life narratives' we mean the personal stories captured through workshops as well as acquired contribution; the structured, "uniform" style of short, autobiographical story (Poletti 2011: 78) in addition to the more fragmentary, incomplete life narratives.

Value, challenges and opportunities

Broadcasting and distributing personal stories from public service media (PSM) platforms suggests both challenges and opportunities with this 'top down' approach to what is typically regarded as 'bottom up' community based participatory storytelling practice that has its roots in community media (Burgess 2006: 207; Hartley and McWilliam 2009). Community Media is generally defined as "media that allows for access and participation" (Rennie 2006: 22) and is a non-profit sector that largely aims to represent marginalised voices and communities, and to contribute to a diverse media landscape. According to Howley (2009: 73), what makes community media distinct is that it offers opportunities

for civil society to “talk back” to the larger institutions of public life. Now, though, PSMs such as the BBC and the ABC are using community media practices, such as grass roots collaborative storytelling, as part of their programming to engage with participatory cultures and foster new forms of audience engagement (Hutchinson 2012).

As a number of researchers have suggested, opportunities for audience participation and involvement, such as that the ABC provides through ABC Open and Heywire, are a fundamental way through which PSMs demonstrate their role and relevance in a fully digitised media environment, and participatory practices are now a central part of the public service remit (see for example Hutchinson 2012; Enli 2008: 105; Martin 2002: 57). Furthermore, both ABC Open and Heywire have a particular relevance to the ABC’s Charter and role as a national public broadcaster and the Corporation’s aims to contribute to national identity, reflect cultural diversity and broadcast programs of an educational nature (Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983 2013: 5-6). As projects that endeavour to amplify voices from under-represented rural and regional communities, ABC Open and Heywire also embody the potential to be useful to the cohorts they engage as storytellers.

It is significant that both ABC Open and Heywire specifically invite self-representational storytelling from rural and regional people, as opposed to members of the broader Australian society. The initiation of projects such as ABC Open and Heywire clearly correspond to the overarching objectives of the ABC and the obligations of the Corporation as outlined in its Charter, in particular its obligations of social inclusion and recognition. The ABC Charter lists the functions of the Corporation which include a commitment to providing a high standard of broadcasting services within Australia, and to provide broadcasting programs which contribute to a sense of national identity and reflect the cultural diversity of Australia (Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983 2008: 4). The ABC’s approach to representing cultural diversity and demonstrating social inclusion has been through acknowledging “special populations” which, according to Hawkins, have “traditionally been ‘women’, ‘rural’ and ‘children’” (Hawkins 2010: 291). Through ABC Open and Heywire, the ABC can be seen to be addressing two of these target groups simultaneously—namely, children (or youth), and rural people—and providing these ‘special populations’ with programming that is distinctly tailored to them.

Despite the value of projects such as these to the PSM, they also produce particular challenges for the broadcasting institution in areas such as editorial policies, audience expectations, and the production and broadcast of quality content, along with the chance of possibly larger institutional expectations or constraints. ABC producers and editors involved in ABC Open and Heywire have specific rationales for each project, as well as a particular editorial policy that they must fulfil. What is of interest is how the ABC’s editorial guidelines (2011) and Charter obligations make incorporating user-created content, such as personal stories, a challenging task for the Corporation, as well as for the members of the audience whose participation it invites. For instance, while the PSM

seeks to involve its audiences in processes of media production, it must also maintain the integrity of the institution (Hutchinson 2013: 3), and meet its audience's expectations for a particular style and quality of broadcast content (Thumim 2009: 630). An inevitable challenge for the ABC in its management of ABC Open and Heywire lies in how to allow people to create their own stories and express their voices under the auspices of the institution, while also ensuring these stories and voices will be interesting to the ABC's audiences. This is also potentially problematic for the storytellers, too. As Hancox suggests, an increased emphasis on appealing to audience expectations could mean that the personal intentions of the storytellers go unfulfilled (2012: 67).

In addition to the ABC's editorial policies and the Corporation's particular objectives for the project, Heywire also has a strong political agenda, is partially funded by a number of Federal Government departments, and functions as a storytelling competition; thus, while its central aims are to "provide a positive opportunity for young people's voices to be heard" and, through the website, provide them with a platform for representing their own lives and identities (Sadov 2009: 3), there is significant pressure for young people's storytelling to meet the larger goals and intentions of its Government sponsors, as well as those of the ABC. For example, the Government departments that provide Heywire with funding all have a vested interest in creating and sustaining strong rural and regional communities. The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), for instance, lists Heywire as one of a number of projects that it invests in in order to "develop leadership and human capacity in primary industries and rural communities" (RIRDC 2012: 137). This reveals that RIRDC's interest in Heywire and hopes for what it will achieve centre on ideas of community development and the development of young community leaders. This marks a significant shift away from understanding Heywire as a life storytelling project which hopes to provide a space for the seldom heard voices and stories of rural and regional youth. It also reveals that the Heywire project comprises numerous, somewhat competing agendas which the ABC must manage in order to ensure the project is successful and useful to the Corporation, the project's Government sponsors, and also to youth.

In both Heywire and ABC Open, contributions by members of the public are edited and professionally produced by ABC staff. While user-created content such as personal narratives are not expected to meet professional standards, 'good storytelling' is nonetheless important. As Thumim observed of Capture Wales, the personal stories are "framed as a self-representation by a member of the public" and therefore neither facilitators nor the audience for the stories expect them to meet the standard of content that is created and produced by professionals (2009: 630). Somewhat contradictorily, however, a certain degree of quality must be achieved in order for the institution to meet the expectations of its audience and its charter obligation to provide "broadcasting services of a high standard" (Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983 2013: 5). This reveals an interesting tension within PSM projects that invite user-created content: while

ABC Open and Heywire aim to provide an opportunity for people to create and share their own media content, and represent their own lives in an apparently unmediated way, self-representations must also be edited and shaped by media professionals in order to ensure they are interesting and accessible to the ABC audience.

The framing and shaping of personal narratives for broadcast platforms naturally invites questions as to the authenticity and authorship of the storyteller's voice. Hartley suggests that when the expertise of media professionals is used in projects like these the results are excellent, particularly in regard to production quality; however, there is the concern as to whether the facilitation of these workshops is a "bully or a pulley" (2009: 131). Here, Hartley questions how much the digital story is personal and autobiographical, and how much has been shaped in order to achieve broadcast production values and themes to appeal to a wider audience: that is, how extensively does the institution shape the stories produced?

Another challenge is the very personal and intimate nature of people's stories. In the context of public television broadcasting, the BBC Capture Wales digital storytelling project facilitators were upfront in noting that the process for digital storytelling was 'not a safe one' as these stories were bound for publication and would be shared with strangers (Meadows and Kidd 2009: 102); Heywire, on the other hand, specifies that the project offers a "safe and protected space – a space for young people to interact freely" through sharing stories about their lives (Sadov 2009: 3). A safe environment is also promoted by ABC Open. A key concern with storytellers feeling safe is whether the stories will still contain the same emotional details and depth. In life storytelling projects there are numerous anxieties surrounding the storyteller's safety and the need to protect them from harm, as well as the project facilitator's concerns over production quality. Furthermore, as Lambert notes, although emotional and personal content is an important element of storytelling, it is something that needs to be done respectfully and with a fair degree of common sense. There is a risk of exploitation of the emotional aspects of a story, so such personal emotions have to be treated sensitively and with maturity (2006: 53). Hence, storytellers need to feel that their stories are valued, and to trust that the personal elements will be treated with respect.

Writing of workshop facilitation, Hancox (2012) suggests trust is paramount in the workshop phases of storytelling. Therefore, establishing trust from the outset is vital for supporting people to express and represent themselves wholly and honestly. The storyteller must feel their story will be treated with care. So, at what point do facilitators need to adapt to their participants' needs, and how does this facilitation process impact on the overall telling of the story? Hancox's recent research makes some interesting points about the ideas the facilitator might have about the outcomes of such a storytelling workshop, and suggests that these ideas may be at odds with how the participants want to tell their stories (2012: 70).

Some ways in which tensions can emerge between the participants and the institution can be seen in the case of Heywire, particularly during the editorial processes when the ABC shapes the stories of youth for broadcast. For some young people, having their stories edited by the ABC is a major intrusion on what they feel is a very personal story that belongs to them only and not the ABC. Jodie³ describes her mixed emotions when discovering that the ABC's edited version of her story was "completely different" from her original narrative:

When I first heard what they [the ABC] had done, I was actually quite upset. In the original I was singing the whole time, like the entire way through. And that's the song... It's actually quite funny. It was the song I had dreamt my grandmother was singing after she passed away. It still stays with me to this day so I sang it behind my story, like as I was speaking it, and then they took most of it out. When I heard what they had done—I didn't hear it until it was released—so they didn't actually ask me and stuff. But I really like the story now. I listened to it again and I thought they'd done a really good job. But I suppose I was touchy at the time and I was like "why did they do that to my story!" and stuff like that, but now I think it's really good what they'd done. I was singing and playing guitar in the background, and you do hear a bit of that in what they've done (interview, December 2013).

Jodie's experience is unique. According to other rural and regional Heywire storytellers and also to the ABC's description that "we work with them to produce their stories" (Atkins, interview, November 2012), the ABC do not usually edit people's narratives without consulting them. Although Jodie's experience seems to have been an exception, it reveals a number of tensions inherent in the Heywire project. For example, there are clear tensions between the way Jodie wanted to use Heywire for sharing her personal story and the ABC's needs for her narrative to look and sound a certain way for broadcast.

Despite challenges such as these, interviews with Heywire participants revealed that the project also provided youth a unique opportunity for storytelling and online self-representation which they valued to a high degree. While most young Australians who live in either urban or non-metropolitan areas have available to them numerous diverse media tools and spaces for interaction, participation, and self-presentation, the usefulness of Heywire for many was that it specifically invited them to share stories about their lives. As such, as a space for *narrative* self-representation, it differed extensively from other media that have a high degree of youth participation, such as online gaming and social media (Ito et al. 2010: 11). As Jodie described,

³ Names of the Heywire participants have been changed to protect the individual's anonymity.

On Heywire you're telling a story because you want people to know about something, whereas with Facebook and online media you put up posts and you put up photos you want people to see; you want people to think that you're some... You put yourself on a different stand, I s'pose. You make yourself look prettier, or... You know, people do it, they make themselves look more handsome or... you know, more attractive I s'pose, and more... um... what's the word? Successful I s'pose. Whereas with Heywire you're just being yourself and that's the best part about it, you know, where you're just telling a story that's close to you and by doing that you're going to touch other people (interview, December 2013).

For Jodie, Heywire was an opportunity and space for her to share fond memories of summer holidays at her grandparents' house in rural Tottenham and describe the more sorrowful, recent days she sat by her grandmother's deathbed singing to her as she died. In style, Jodie's story is confessional and deeply personal. It is a very significant story for Jodie and she valued having somewhere to tell it. Unlike Facebook, which Jodie suggests encourages glossed-over, superficial self-presentations (interview, December 2013), Heywire was a space where she could tell a story that mattered deeply to her and represent her life in a way that she felt was authentic.

This is not to suggest that the Heywire website does not encourage or coerce a particular style of narrative self-representation. Heywire, like all online platforms, has precise affordances which guide, enable, and constrain practice to varying degrees (Gillespie in Clark et al. 2014: 1447). Significantly, though, it is clear from Jodie's comments that Heywire, as a storytelling space, afforded quite a different style of self-representation and self-disclosure than afforded by her social media platforms. As a platform that invites self-representation from rural and regional young people, it offered a platform that Jodie felt was both an appropriate and 'safe' space for her to represent herself as a loving granddaughter, a singer and a storyteller—a self-representation that she indicates was uniquely enabled by Heywire.

In the case of ABC Open, opportunities exist for both the storytellers and the broadcasters by way of a co-creative knowledge exchange and a dialogical approach to learning, where participants gain various media production and literacy skills to continue storytelling in their local communities, and PSMs gain local content and voices, as well as newly skilled citizen journalists and storytellers at the coalface of communities. The importance of giving the audience a voice is also of interest, and the motivations for this are often in relation to providing local content. The Australian Content Standard (ACS) "requires all commercial free-to-air television licensees to broadcast an annual minimum transmission quota of 55 per cent Australian programming between 6am and midnight" (ACMA, 2014). Although government funded broadcasters, such as the ABC, are defined as non-commercial, they still need to fulfil a required quota of local content. Furthermore, storytelling projects provide an amalgamation between community media practices and

public broadcasting platforms for the benefit of the public interest. As ABC Open states on their website:

We always want people to feel that they come away with something - a new skill, an audience for their ideas, stories and work, and to feel that the collaboration has been fruitful. ABC Open isn't about getting free content, or taking away resources from the rest of the ABC. It's new funding to help people do what they want to do (<https://open.abc.net.au/faq>).

Thus the broadcasting institution has augmented its role as an educational institution by providing its audience with the acquisition of various digital literacy skills, and, importantly, giving voice to under-represented communities.

A key challenge with ABC Open is the nature of maintaining community engagement and sustainable practice. ABC Open Project Director Cath Dwyer noted in her Master's thesis (Dwyer, 2014) which focused on ABC Open that continuing motivation for some participants was an issue. Participants need a reason to contribute. As Dwyer described, in some cases participants would start out enthusiastically, but taper off after a few months. This can be due to a variety of contributors' personal circumstances and motivations (Dwyer 2014: 120, 126). Clearly, there is the need to maintain passion in the community to sustain participation and engagement. This seems to be a challenge in other community based digital media projects in other sectors as well, so it can be a common concern for such grassroots storytelling initiatives (Heck, 2015). Although, Dwyer did find that participants still maintained use of their new skill sets in other ways, hence, fulfilling a key aim of the project for participants to learn sustainable skills, even if they did not use these within the ABC project. Additionally, she noted that participants who published via the ABC considered it valuable, adding credibility and legitimacy to their work. The ABC is trusted, and has a reputation of integrity in the community and this added to this legitimacy. Further outcomes included participants' increased level of competence in these new skills, and the growth and strengthening of networks in participants' local communities (2014: 125-130).

The ABC Open project is evidence of how an institution such as the ABC provides a very prominent opportunity for amplifying voices and contributing to society based and social learning. One can also hypothesise that the intentions of participants would be supported in this context, and is an important part of the core values of the projects. In projects initiated as part of the larger ABC Open initiative—such as the 'Aftermath: Flood Recovery' project and the 'A Day in the Life' project—opportunities for learning new skills and expressing one's personal stories is offered as an important incentive to participants. Participants need to know from the outset that their voice is respected and valued by the broadcaster, that their story is important, and that the learning experiences they gain for their story contributions count long after the workshop has finished. Additionally, it is important participants feel the story is authentic for them; their own

authorial intentions should be respected so that processes of facilitation and curation do not impact upon and shape their narratives to the extent that they are less authentic to the participants.

Conclusion

Through ABC Open and Heywire, the ABC can be seen to be responding to changing practices in media consumption and production by engaging cohorts of its audience in practices of content creation and distribution within the institution. Audience participation projects such as ABC Open and Heywire are increasingly important to the contemporary public service remit, and increasingly a way through which the ABC provides a service to its public. However, tensions and challenges are inevitable as the PSM seeks to facilitate the sharing of personal stories on a public platform. While both ABC Open and Heywire endeavour to provide a 'safe' space for the articulation of self-representational narratives, the institution's need for these projects to fulfil particular objectives mean that personal narratives must be shaped for a wider audience, and edited or polished in order to meet broadcast standards and the expectations of ABC audience.

Managing such personal content emerges as an area of tension for both the institution and the participants. As arose in the case of Jodie, tensions can emerge between participants and the institution as the ABC shapes personal stories for public broadcast. Another key challenge in the case of ABC Open was ensuring the sustainability of the project since participants often do not remain involved for an extended period of time. While a shortage of participants has not yet been a problem for ABC Open, it is possible that this may be a future issue. Since neither Heywire nor ABC Open would exist without the participation of members of the public, it is important that both projects remain astute to the intentions of their participants, and are able to evolve in response to participants' needs. In spite of these challenges, the longevity of Heywire, and the large number of contributions that ABC Open has received since its initiation in 2010 reveals that both these projects are indeed fulfilling some useful functions to the rural and regional people whose participation they invite. The research on Heywire and ABC Open thus indicates that although such projects comprise multiple challenges, there is potential for mutual benefit between the PSM and its audience.

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