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**Slide 1 title**

**Digital literacy and the active audience: Growing objective knowledge and creative imagination in post-broadcast media.**

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**Slide 2 Provider model**

Audiences are transforming from 'effects of media' into 'agents of knowledge.' Digital literacy has implications not only for teenage consumerism but also (simultaneously) for the growth of science, imagination and innovation, using the creative capital of whole populations. Instead of the industrial-era publisher/provider model of causation in creative media, it is now possible to propose a *demand* model of creativity in an evolutionary model of the economy.

**Slide 3 demand model**

This sees creative culture in terms of the growth of knowledge among the entire population, not merely among industry or artistic experts. Instead of being the *objects* of causal sequence, audiences become its *subject*, navigating as agents, not being pushed around as passive effects. This model pushes out towards the future, not the past; it is an 'emergent' model of innovation. Here creativity may be located as part of

'human capital' – the abundant resource numbering billions, formerly known as the audience.

#### **Slide 4 Value chain to Social network markets**

A demand-led model of creative citizen-navigators requires a reformulation of the familiar 'value chain' approach to cultural production, seen as a one-way causal chain, which typically goes like this:

- (i) producer (creation) and production (manufacture);
- (ii) commodity (e.g. text, IP) and distribution (via media);
- (iii) consumer or audience.

Instead what is needed is:

- (i) *agents* (who may be individuals or firms), characterised by choice, decision-making and learning (*origination*);
- (ii) *social networks*, both real and virtual (*adoption*);
- (iii) market-based *enterprise*, organizations and coordinating institutions (*retention*) (Potts et al 2007).

And instead of linear causation, what is needed is a dynamic and productive interrelationship among *agents, networks and enterprise*; all are engaged in the mutual enterprise of creating values, both symbolic and economic. This is a complex open system in which everyone is an active agent, not a closed expert linear value

chain controlled by 'industry.' Individuals originate ideas; networks adopt them; enterprises retain them.

### **Slide 5 Baran**

This is the concept of the *social network market*, the special property of which is that individual choices are determined by the choices of others within the network. This is also Richard Lanham's 'economics of attention.'<sup>1</sup> A social network market is at work whenever you read a review or heed 'word of mouth' before trying a film, restaurant or novelty of any kind. It explains celebrity culture; tastes and identities are formed on the basis of the choices of others. It underlies enterprises such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and Amazon, all of which operate by networking individual choices.

### **Slide 6 creative destruction**

Social networks are a valuable adaptive mechanism for dealing with uncertainty, risk, and novelty at the macro-scale of populations, even while they are driven by micro-scale individual choices. They occupy the border between established markets and non-market dynamics, especially internet affordances (Web 2.0), and creative expression. And they work both ways: just as individual consumers decide on this

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<sup>1</sup> Richard A. Lanham (2006) *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

basis what to do, wear – or even be – so producers respond to the choices of others in deciding where to invest (hence the sequel industry).

### **Slide 7 OECD<sup>2</sup>**

And neither ‘agents’ nor ‘enterprise’ discriminates between producers and consumers, which is of crucial importance in the fast-growing area of user-created content, consumer-led innovation and self-made media. People can make enterprises out of enthusiasms. One moment you’re a fan; next you’re signing autographs.

After decades when the accepted models of audiences granted agency to producers not consumers, here at last is a way to *harnesses the creative energies of all the agents in the system*, and a mechanism – the social network market – that coordinates their creative and communicative choices and activities.

### **Slide 8 Popper: Objective to subjective agency; Subjective to objective knowledge**

What might be the impact of consumer/users and social network markets on the growth of knowledge?

The philosopher Karl Popper produced a typology of the ‘levels’ of language:

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<sup>2</sup> OECD (12-Apr-2007) *Participative Web: User-Created Content* (Working Party on the Information Economy): [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/57/14/38393115.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/57/14/38393115.pdf)

1. Self-expression
2. Communication
3. Description
4. Argumentation (Popper 1972: chapter 3)<sup>3</sup>

For Popper, the first two levels produce subjective knowledge; the second two, evolved via 'extrasomatic' media in the form of writing/printing, can lead to objective knowledge. The media-entertainment complex in general is obsessively focused on the first two levels. A question not generally asked of the creative industries is therefore this: can this sector contribute to 'description' and 'argumentation' as well as 'self-expression' and 'communication,' and can that contribute to the evolution and growth of objective knowledge?

Here print-literacy is an instructive antecedent. Printing enabled an evolutionary step-change in literacy, in both scope and extent. Karl Popper linked the growth of knowledge in an open complex adaptive system to the invention of printing. Although it took a long time, print-literacy began to be propagated throughout the population, usually by means of schooling, which was increasingly taken over and paid for by the state. This cumulative public investment eventually paid off in unexpected ways. Print-literacy began to escape from instrumental purposes like

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<sup>3</sup> Karl Popper (1972) *Objective Knowledge*. Oxford: OUP.

religion, business and government, to become a culture-wide capability. What it might be used *for* also escaped from institutional purposes.

### **Slide 9 Uses of Print Literacy**

As a socio-cultural resource – a form of embedded human capital – print-literacy enabled the growth of:

- scientific discovery,
- *journalism* and the reading public,
- ‘psychological *realism*’ (Shakespeare), and the modern *novel*.

Print-literacy underpinned the Enlightenment (both origination and dissemination of new ideas), political democratisation, industrialisation and the mass media. It was therefore associated with the ‘creative destruction’ of old ideas – magic, superstition, anachronism, oral relativism – and also with another kind of destruction: political revolutions tended to occur in countries where literacy rates stood at between one and two thirds of the population, as in England, France, and Russia in successive centuries.

### **Slide 10 To have Great Poets**

It is therefore worth asking whether the recent mass propagation of creative *digital literacy* may be enabling a further evolutionary step-change in the growth of knowledge. If so, two things need to happen. First, ‘ordinary people’ (previously

understood as non-economic audiences) need to be able to use the social network market as both agents and enterprises, to share their own expertise and to develop new networked expertise, such that they too can contribute to the coordinated digital evolution of science, imagination and journalism: knowledge in short.

The second thing is that 'consumer-created content' needs to be used for more than self-expression and communication. The association of digital literacy with commercialised experience – for instance in computer games – seems to blind observers to its larger potential. But the emancipation of large numbers of previously excluded (or neglected) people into the 'freedom of the internet' and into 'creative freedom' will, if successful and if pushed beyond a 'look at me' stage, assist in the development of knowledge in an open innovation network. Consumer-created content is an excellent means for recruiting new participants into that open network, and for lifting levels of digital literacy and popular expertise. That's what YouTube, Facebook and MMOGs are doing. They may even be modelling for the coming century the role – if not the methods – of public schooling in the earlier period of print literacy.

**Slide 11 Expert + user Olive Riley/Mike Rubbo**

Current attitudes to user-created content see it as an end in itself (and, as usual with popular culture, not a very worthy one), as if knowledge of the personal is all that's

necessary for people outside existing professional elites. But it is no advance to reinforce the barriers between popular and expert culture: 'science' for producers; 'self' for consumers. The consequences of doing that are already part of the crisis confronting contemporary societies. People feel cut off from expert systems, including both science and entertainment, and are more sceptical than ever about 'objective knowledge,' whether it is presented as science or news. Not only are the claims and products of scientific research often rejected or delayed in the court of public opinion – GM foods, nuclear energy, global warming – but even the modern commitment to rationality and the open society are undermined from within by resurgent religiosity (including 'new-age' spiritualism), 'me'-culture, and a moralising politics of fear.

### **Slide 12 Expert + user Jennings/Pan's Labyrinth**

The need is not to separate 'science' (description & argumentation) and 'popular culture' (self-expression & communication) further from one another but to invest as heavily as possible in holding them together. This is something that creative social networks and social network markets can facilitate, as long as creative digital literacy is propagated on a population-wide basis. The shift from broadcast to interactive media has begun to democratise the publication of self-expression, and it complicates the entire edifice of 'representation' in both symbolic and political communication because people can now 'represent' themselves via self-made media. They are no longer satisfied with deferring to professional representatives; they want direct voice,

action, creative expression – and, increasingly, knowledge. Creative industries are the generative engine of emergent participatory knowledge. If the history of print-literacy is anything to go by, democratising digital literacy will unleash presently unthought-of innovations; these may be as remarkable over time as have been the products of print-realism; science, the novel, and journalism.

### **Slide 13 New! Improved! Knowledge!**

But there is a further step that can be imagined. For Karl Popper, the value of printing is that it enables scientific theories to be published, and publication lays these open to criticism and argumentation, which is essential to the process of testing and error-elimination. When Popper was writing, publication was a restrictive practice, apt to be captured by Kuhnian ‘normal science.’ But now publication is thoroughly democratised, at least in principle: it is in the hands of individuals. The general public can *publish*.

This does have its drawbacks:

Here in the United Arab Emirates ... It's not just that TV wannabes seek to start their careers as directors, in our territory they go out and set up their own channel! Number of satellite channels broadcasting from Dubai Media City – about 250 and rising. Number of truly

competent makers of television in Dubai Media City – about 200, but most of them are working for just 4 of the channels!<sup>4</sup>

But this is not a story of incompetent wannabes. It is one of emergent participation in a social network market. Some people don't get it; they want the rewards without the talent. But the reverse is also true. Many social networks rely on talent without reward: the Wikipedia; Flickr; Jumpcut; TV fansites; 'oral' history (including digital storytelling); Google Sky (from your house to the universe), computer games for problem solving (e.g. [worldwithouthit.org/](http://worldwithouthit.org/)), and critical discussion of creationism on YouTube. The 'long tail' means that there are infinitely more examples.

#### **Slide 14 Evolution of knowledge?**

If 'human capital' is the basic resource for a creative economy, it follows that education is an important component in the policy mix. However, education too must be 'demand-led,' organised as much through entertainment, media and consumption as through formal schooling. For the desire to enjoy creative content within a social network is the mechanism through which individual learning occurs, and these social networks, given life as they are by desires, daydreams, mischief-making and play, form the enabling infrastructure for new knowledge. So a final question is this: what achievements will be enabled by the combination of creative services, social network

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<sup>4</sup> Malcolm Thomson, commenting on [flowtv.org/?p=754](http://flowtv.org/?p=754). See also [sandlander.blogspot.com/](http://sandlander.blogspot.com/)

markets, and universal digital literacy? It's time for audience research to look for some answers to that question.