

Election Night Broadcasts and the Hybrid Media System: a case study of Australia

Introduction

Hybrid media theory explains how media systems are in a constant state of fluidity and dynamism; that they are neither new nor old but a hybrid, shifting and particulate combination thereof. The news media is considered nonlinear, recreating its own systems as actors rearrange and renegotiate their relationships with one another (Chadwick 2017) and thus we must assess how different news media relate to each other and aims to expose “significan[t]” findings that would be obscured by “boundary fetishism” (Pieterse 2001: 2) and “dichotomous” or “essentialist” approaches (Chadwick 2017: 11).

Chadwick (2013) applied hybrid media system theory largely to electoral events in the UK and USA. It was subsequently applied across a range of countries (e.g. Mattoni and Ceccobelli 2018), but rarely in Australia, beyond Fisher et al.’s (2018) longitudinal approach. Furthermore, research has largely focused on the campaign period (as opposed to election nights) and national elections (as opposed to local or state elections). To address these gaps, this study uses Chadwick’s hybrid media theorising to analyse election night coverage of a state election in Australia. Using a combination of live ethnography of broadcast coverage, social media data, and interviews with reporters and producers, the analysis shows that coverage is hybridised in some ways but also adheres to more ‘traditional’ approaches that confound theoretical expectations.

Reporting Australian elections

The Australian news media appear to be particularly powerful in their coverage of elections for several interrelated reasons (Denemark et al. 2007:107; Young 2010: 87-88, 232). First, Australia has some of the highest concentrations of media ownership in the world (Tiffen and Gittins 2004: 182–3; Newman et al. 2018: 126), and the news media has increasingly become highly partisan, and competitive (Brookes 2020: 326), particularly during elections, with a more centrist position in the 2004 election (Gans and Leigh 2011) giving way to outright partisanship in most elections (Young 2017: 885; Carson and McNair 2018) leading politicians to take the power of media owners “very seriously” (Young 2010: 242). Second, many Australians make up their minds during the campaign, and these people are often most open to media influence (Young 2004: 45). Third, compulsory voting means that most disengaged (and often undecided) voters are drawn to polling booths and this can, for example, increase the effectiveness of negative campaigning and a focus on swing-voters (Chen 2010: 13). Fourth, the majoritarian electoral system means that a small number of swing voters in marginal seats have outsized influence on the result, and these voters, particularly in the context of compulsory voting, make negative campaigning especially effective at setting agendas (Carson et al. 2019; Chen 2010) and shifting public discourse (Bruns and Moon 2018: 443). However, the Australian public has begun to disengage with election reporting, particularly by traditional news media (Cameron and McAllister 2016: 8–10; Fieldhouse et al. 2018), with generally low, though rising, levels of media trust compared to other nations (Newman et al. 2018), with the ABC most trusted at election time (ABC 2019). This makes Australian elections an interesting and important case, and one in which we might expect to see hybrid media logics deployed (Fisher et al. 2018).

Studies of Australian election reporting have largely focused on the campaign period, deploying content analysis and/or interviews. Young (2010), for example, mixed quantitative content analysis, media mapping and qualitative readings, focusing predominantly on ‘traditional’ media coverage during the 2001, 2004 and 2007 federal election campaigns.

Using a case study of the Tampa Incident¹ and informed by agenda-setting theory (McCombs and Shaw 1972), Young (2010: 148-157) argues that “the lack of diversity in Australian media” made it “relatively easy for politicians and their advisors to set the news agenda by focusing on a handful of outlets”. This was particularly through intermedia agenda-setting in which “a strong message promoted on talkback and tabloid newspapers in Sydney and Melbourne [...] had a far-reaching impact on the news agenda” in part due to Australia’s concentrated media (Young 2010: 148). Young (2010: 177) argues that “Australian coverage seems less comprehensive than in other similar countries” with shorter soundbites, less time reporting elections, decreasing reference to experts, and a growing focus on the electoral process and a 60% decline in stories that mainly focused on policy (Young 2010: 182).

Many of the issues Young described continue to play an important role. Carson and McNair (2018) analyse print and broadcast reporting on the 2016 Federal election. They find that, while diminished, print media remains important, placing politics, and particularly negative campaigning on the front page. Town hall style debates, organised by media organisations, did serve to generate more interactivity and limit parties attempts to control the narrative in a “guided democracy” (Brookes 2011: 68). In the 2019 Federal Election the limited access given to journalists on the Liberal Party campaign bus led to complaints, and this was arguably the most presidential election to date, with virtually all of the focus on the two leaders and extensive negative campaigning (Strangio and Walter 2020; Carson and Zion 2020). With a hyper-competitive news environment during Australian elections, news organisations have worked to maintain their competitive advantage and position themselves as worthy and trusted actors, including by creating distinctive online offerings that act as one-stop-shops (Brookes 2018; 2020). However, the audience for traditional media has continued to decline (Newman et al. 2018) and digital disruptions have deeply affected the ability of the press, in particular, to cover election campaigns (Bruns 2010) and leading parties to broaden their media targets and approaches to include social and alternative media (Carson and McNair 2018: 424-425; Chen 2018; Burgess and Bruns 2012) alongside TV shows that blur entertainment and news such as *The Project* (Carson and Zion 2020).

Chen’s (2010: 21) comparative analysis of elections across Australia, New Zealand and Canada predates Chadwick. Finding that existing theories fail to explain differences, Chen suggests that debates need to be hybridised but does not go further. Fisher et al. (2018) use Chadwick’s theory of the hybrid media system to analyse the role and significance of the Australia press gallery using two waves of interviews. They find that Prime Minister Malcom Turnbull increased social media use and reduced his time on talkback radio to avoid journalistic filters (Fisher et al. 2018: 63), concluding that “the major parties are continuing to employ a hybrid media logic to maximize their audience across traditional and digital platforms”. This conclusion is broadly supported by Burgess and Bruns (2012) and McNair et al. (2017). The former analyse media sources used in #ausvotes Twitter data, finding: “significant overlap and interdependence” and thus “far from being a separate ‘space’ that sits outside of the mainstream media, Twitter was being used to filter, comment on or use mainstream media content as a catalyst for further discussion of election issues, or (more often than not) of the role of the media in the election campaign” (Burgess and Bruns 2012: 391, 395). Such developments have arguably strengthened rather than harmed Australia’s legacy media who still maintain a key agenda-setting role (McNair et al. 2017).

Three important gaps can be observed based on a brief review of the literature. First, there is limited research on election night broadcasts. Research has focused on election nights as rituals (Ross and Joslyn 1988; Orr 2015); their impact on the mandate to govern (Mendelsohn

¹ The Tampa Incident refers to the MV Tampa, a Norwegian container ship that rescued survivors from an Indonesian ferry that was sinking off Christmas Island with refugees on board. The Australian government refused permission for the ship to dock, with special forces boarding.

1998); and on how it impacts voting where polls remain open in other parts of a country (Tuchman and Coffin 1971). Australian research is scant. Surveys have reported that the audience for election night broadcasts tends to be politically interested and older (Young 2010: 35-37; Cameron and McAllister 2016: 8), while studies of reporting are largely limited to stating viewing figures (Carson and Zion 2020; Carson and McNair 2018). Orr (2015) presents a legally framed overview of Australian election night broadcasts amongst other countries, but Orr's study lacks the kinds of granular analysis called for by Chadwick. Indeed, the focus on the content of reporting has meant that little attention has been paid to how campaign coverage came to be the way it was. Second, with some notable exceptions (e.g. Bruns and Highfield 2013) research has focused on national rather than state elections. Third, no study has, as yet, analysed Australian election coverage through the prism of Chadwick's hybrid media system. Research has been limited to passing mentions of intermedia agenda setting (Carson and McNair 2018: 440; Young 2010), with many studies separating media into different categories or focusing on descriptive content analysis (e.g. Chen 2018; Carson and McNair 2018) rather than the process by which content is produced.

The Hybrid Media System

Andrew Chadwick's concept of the hybrid media system has become a key intervention in the study of media and communication. Driven by a range of factors including the rise of *newer* media, the interaction of newer and older media logics, and changing power dynamics between media and politicians, Chadwick argues that media systems are now hybrid. Building on a range of theoretical frameworks and traditions that employ the concept of hybridity (e.g. Latour 2005; Jenkins 2006; McNair 2006), Chadwick sets out what he describes as an ontology of hybridity that "highlights complexity, interdependence, and transition" and a way to grasp "flux, in-betweenness, the interstitial, and the liminal" (Chadwick 2017: 4), critiquing boundary fetishism (Pieterse 2001: 220) and helps us to understand the relationships between what he describes as older and newer media logics co-opting and adjusting to each other creating new, particulate hybrid media systems that remain in flux (Chadwick 2017:14-15, 21-6).

Chadwick applies hybridity to how power develops in a media system. Instead of power being rigid and inflexible, Chadwick (2017: 17) proposes that power is constantly shifting and relational in nature, and that the system is made of both "communication and organisation" buffeted by different actors seeking advantage and in a constant state of "recreation" and "becoming" (2017: 18). Chadwick combines his theory of power in the hybrid media system with the widely cited concept of media logic (Altheide and Snow 1985), proposing that the media system is so "fragmented" and "polycentric" that it "calls for a reappraisal of the idea of media logic and its disaggregation into different competing yet interdependent *logics*" (original emphasis) that do not emanate from the media and act upon politics but are "a force that is co-created by media, political actors, and publics" (Chadwick 2017: 24). Hybrid media system theory "seeks to understand the interactions that determine the construction of media content" (p25)

At the heart of Chadwick's approach is the "political information cycle", which Chadwick (2017: 62) differentiates from the "news cycle". Whereas news cycles are elite-driven constructions, political information cycles allow for non-elite actors to intervene and contest news as it occurs. Political information cycles are not necessarily temporal; they may rely on content from social media or other historical sources that lay "dormant" (2017: 64). And, crucially, the manner in which these cycles proceed is multi-faceted, is multimedia, relies on the hybridisation of older and newer media logics, and brings both mainstream and amateur actors together in a constant process of competition, interdependence and recursion (2017:

64). These cycles loosen the grip of elite actors on how news proceeds and form a crucial part of the hybrid media system.

When cast like this, the hybrid media system is where the location of power and influence—that is to say, where power is created and maintained—is not with just “older” media or “newer” media, but in how they interact (Chadwick 2017: 18–21). It allows us to comprehend the increased ability of amateur and non-elite actors to contest and interrogate news narratives as they occur, and to intervene in political information cycles (Chadwick 2017: 74–5). Importantly, the theory provides a new tool for analysing election nights because it explicitly considers social media and the role of bloggers and other “alternative” media alongside more traditional actors, and further considers them as a combined assemblage, rather than as separate and demarcated forces (Chadwick 2017: 51–60).

Chadwick (2017: 49-69) explains that the different institutional contexts between the UK and US can influence how hybrid media systems operate, and elsewhere suggests that institutions may still “mediate” and shape the eventual outcomes (Anstead and Chadwick 2009: 58), reducing the potential for a hybrid media system to prompt hybrid action as institutions seek to protect their power and objectives (Dennis et al. 2016: 23–4; Chadwick 2017: 7; Wright 2015). Following this, the important differences in Australia, outlined above, make discrete research necessary. Yet, apart from Fisher et al. 2018 - who used a very different research design to Chadwick - there is a dearth of analyses.

Bringing everything together, there is a relatively small but important literature analysing the reporting of Australian elections. However, there has been limited research into both election night broadcasts and state elections. Furthermore, with the exception of Fisher et al., Chadwick’s influential concept of the hybrid media system has not been deployed to study Australian political communication. This study seeks to address these gaps by asking the following research question:

To what extent, and how, have election night broadcasts in Australian second-order elections become hybridised, and what factors are driving these changes?

The next section presents the method used to answer the research question.

Method

To address the research question, a case study research design was adopted, and informed by Yin’s (2003) approach with its four key tests: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. A case study affords an in-depth, granular analysis of “how” and “why” coverage proceeded as it did (Chadwick 2017: 70) during a contemporaneous event over which the researcher had limited control and in which there are fluid boundaries between the event and its context (Yin 2003). The Victorian state election on the 24th of November 2018 was selected because it was the only second order Australian election during the analysis period, helping to minimise recall bias, and on a practical level, the researchers were physically proximate to many interviewees. It was also considered a single “critical case” that could be used to “confirm, challenge, or extend” a “well-formulated theory” (Yin 2003: 40) and there was at least the potential for replication and the development of external validity² - Yin 2003: 37).

To help achieve construct validity, Yin (2003: 34-36) suggests using multiple sources of data, building a chain of evidence, and asking “key informants” to review the report. This study collects three sources of data to allow for triangulation and the building of chains, while

² Internal validity is not included as it is primarily for experiments or quasi-experiments (Yin 2003: 36).

Antony Green reviewed the final paper. The first two methods are built directly from Chadwick's approach as this is important for reliability (Yin 2003: 37-38). First, a "live ethnography" was conducted of the ABC's "Victoria Votes 2018" results show (6-10.30pm AEDT), and analysed alongside contemporaneous social media content from journalists and politicians featured in the broadcasts. Television remains a vital source of news within the hybrid media system (Chadwick 2017: 10, 59-63) and the ABC was chosen as it is the most widely viewed show (Dyer 2018). Second, four semi-structured 30 to 60-minute interviews were conducted with purposively identified key journalists and editors from the ABC broadcast:

- Michael Rowland, ABC News anchor;
- Antony Green, ABC election analyst;
- Samuel Clark, ABC executive producer (elections, *Insiders*); and
- Brad Ryan, ABC digital news editor (Melbourne)

The interviews sought to understand the context and practice by which these actors operated, including the intent and outcome of broadcast and editorial decisions (Chadwick 2017: 184-5). Questions focused on their practice on the night and why they did what they did and how different media impacted their actions and decisions. Departing from Chadwick's approach, third, contemporaneous data was collected from Twitter, focusing on the hashtag #vicvotes (n=8613). Our analysis focused on Tweets that were sent between 5pm and midnight on polling day. Tweet timestamps were used to compare Twitter activity with discrete events in election coverage, allowing us to gauge audience engagement and interventions.

The analysis was qualitative and thematic in nature, identifying key themes and the relationships between themes occurring during the course of the night that typify how the media system progresses and assembles itself over time (Chadwick 2017). The combination of thematic analysis and chronological, live ethnography allowed the different data to be considered in relation to the rest of the corpus, so that relationships and trends can be identified (Braun and Clarke 2006). Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) assemblage is particularly important to theme identification and is central to Chadwick's approach (2017: 63-4). The chronologically sequential way in which the media system proceeds justifies a similarly chronological treatment of how *themes* and events occur, by treating election night as a series of thematic, sequential events and trends. Now that the method of this study has been outlined, we turn to the analysis of election night.

Background

The Victorian state election on the 24th of November 2018 was the climax of a four-year, fixed cycle in the state's politics. The centre-left Labor Party sought re-election after a term with a slim majority in the lower house. Opinion polls showed the Labor Party holding a solid but not safe lead, with a swing of around 1-2% towards them (Roy Morgan 2018). Given the knife-edge nature of some seats the election night began quite tense and uncertain.

The ABC's coverage started as the polls closed at 6pm, anchored by Michael Rowland and Tamara Oudyn (ABC Victoria newsreader) and featured journalists, analysts and political actors:

- Antony Green, ABC election analyst;
- Richard Willingham, ABC state political reporter;
- Jill Hennessy, then-Minister for Health, Labor Party;
- John Pesutto, then-Shadow Attorney-General, Liberal Party;

- John Brumby, former Premier, Labor Party;
- Jane Hume, federal Senator for Victoria, Liberal Party;
- Barrie Cassidy, then ABC Insiders host; and
- Josh Frydenberg, federal Treasurer, Liberal Party

Coverage was on the ABC's flagship channel, ABC1, in Victoria and nationally via ABC 24 (news channel) until approximately 10:30pm, by which point Antony Green had called the election for the Labor Party in a landslide. The next sections identify key events, presenting them in a rough chronological order.

Receiving the Returns

Election night coverage relies initially on vote tallies (while an exit poll was conducted by commercial broadcaster Nine, it did not receive attention from the ABC), and understanding how results are compiled and distributed to the media helps to explain hybridity in coverage. The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), a statutory authority, is responsible for the election, including the collection of results. While in previous elections results were physically published at a central "tally room", in 2014 and 2018 the VEC established an online "virtual tally room" with the results transmitted every five minutes to subscribed media organisations. The "digitisation of electoral returns and coverage" helps to provide "a more accurate and statistically richer picture of the electoral outcome" and "affirm faith in the integrity of the count" (Orr 2015: 160). Such changes might allow for greater hybridity by, for example, facilitating greater crowd-enabled analysis and data-sharing. However, the VEC's decision to adopt a subscription model limits hybridity. Furthermore, apart from officials, only party scrutineers are present at polling booths, and:

"[Parties] don't tweet those numbers out, they don't make them available on social media--they go up through their internal processes ... so there's no leakage of results--no results available on, for instance, media like Twitter..." (Green 2019)

The progressive, controlled announcement of returns highlights the importance of institutional norms; the Victorian case stands in stark contrast to the American experience where Twitter users can obtain county results before the Associated Press, and the British experience of results being announced only when a constituency's count is complete (Anstead and Chadwick 2009). In Australia, Green (2019) argued that "most people [on Twitter] are just following what the television coverage is". Armed with an understanding of how the results arrive, the coverage of those results can now be analysed.

Calling the Result

A crucial moment (and ritual) on election night is the call of the result. Australian electoral laws and the single transferable vote system shape this; results typically remain provisional for weeks (Orr 2015: 167), but a result is normally called on the night. The ABC focused heavily on Green, who was framed as a national treasure (Green was described as a 'national treasure' in three tweets) and the person who can make the 'definitive' call. Green was centred within the political information cycle: his image featured in the ABC's advertising, he was presented as central to their election night coverage and the software used to project and predict the outcome was described as "his".

While the TV studio might be the "ersatz centre" of election coverage (Coleman 2013: 53), older and newer media logics were combined in hybrid ways to form something *new* - the

ABC elections portal - a space where Green operates as the pinnacle of election knowledge with the power to determine what the results are saying; and where *Green's* call—rather than the call by itself—carries currency as it flows through other media. For example, dozens of tweets talk about Green ‘calling’ the election. This echoes Chadwick’s suggestion that increasingly, actors within a hybrid media system seek to leverage their resources and power “both with and within different but interrelated media” (2017: 14). The interviewees explained that:

“the biggest resource I've got is Antony Green.” (Clark 2019)

“...as far as sources go, to be honest, we were relying on our in-house psephologist Antony Green. For the ABC, the moment we call an election result is the moment Antony calls an election result ... as far as when I'm publishing something on digital, it's when Antony has called it.” (Ryan 2019)

One specific example is Clark and Rowland’s pre-planned attempt to have Green specifically declare the victor using a “punchy statement” that can be used across radio and different online channels. This echoes what Chadwick suggests is a “mobilisation” of the “small scoop”, where the ABC “build[s] momentum” in seeking advantage across the hybrid system (2017: 173–4). The attempt to build momentum is grounded in synchronisation across media:

“I want [Antony] to say to me off-air, I'm ready to call the election. We then have a two-minute break--two-minute pause--where he says, I'm going to call the election. We just take a breath. Off-air, I let the radio colleagues know that they can come to us if they wanna take that live. And we run a breaking news sting, and we're trying to get much better at very succinctly saying, this is the result we're projecting.” (Clark 2019)

They all need to be--particularly Antony--absolutely sure that he's ready to go, so as was the case with Victoria, once that's all clear--and we had prepped this before the show, as part of our production planning, the producer will say "well, when Antony's ready to go, in your earpiece we'll say 'let's go to Antony for some breaking news', which means he's going to call the election." (Rowland 2019)

While this makes sense from a hybrid media logic perspective, for Green it presented a challenge:

There was some pressure to formally--we've got a new protocol now, so they want me to formally call the result, which I did [...] The main tension is that I--I'm a precise mathematician. For me, the result is appearing in the model, which is built around probabilities, so I can see what's going on. The fact that Labor was winning was clear at about five past seven. In the next ten, fifteen minutes that view firmed up--the results firmed up [...] to me, it's not so much "we don't have a winner, we don't have a winner, we have a winner," it's not a binary choice. I can see it coming. But there's a tendency to want to try and make it binary by calling the election. [But] I don't call the result. It's the computer model which predicts [...] they want me to put it in words so that people can understand it better--people seem to understand "oh, you've called it". (Green 2019)

The ritual of calling the results persists (Orr 2015: 165-166), but it has been adapted to hybrid logics: the new process, and the broader coverage, is *designed* so that ABC radio takes a live

stream of Green’s televised pronouncement, and it is simultaneously pushed on the ABC’s online channels (website, YouTube, ABC iView, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) - explicitly blurring the boundaries. Individual journalists also push the call. Rowland, who was on his mobile phone for “most of the night” when not on camera, Tweeted the call with a pre-made memetic graphic that again focuses on Green (Image 1; Rowland 2019). While Green’s declaration originates on television, it is medium-agnostic—the message is adapted and transmitted in different forms across different media and does not privilege television.



Image 1: Election call tweet (Rowland 2018)

Rowland (2019) noted that “getting the call out” across multiple platforms has grown more important as the way in which people consume news has diversified, and this required coordination. This echoes Chadwick’s theory of the political information cycle, which presents as a complex temporal assemblage with new opportunities for elite and non-elite actors to interrogate and contest news as it happens (Chadwick 2017).

Disseminating Results through Broadcast and Online

The dissemination of individual results was both multimedia-enabled and hybrid. The ABC integrated Antony Green’s computer software into its coverage and sought to link on-screen presentations with online and social-enabled material. This integration included a “results strap” and on-screen reminders of the ABC’s website, where results were updating in real time, “add[ing] value” to the VEC’s coverage (Green 2019). The website itself contained pre-prepared coverage of each seat as well as live vote tallies, which were subsequently loaded into televisual coverage, allowing results to be simultaneously displayed in multiple ways, at multiple times, in multiple places.



Image 2: Ongoing count



Image 2: count and cross

The data provided by the VEC was “voluminous”, and the ABC only used some of the data to enable its predictions (Green 2019). The results generated were two-fold: the VEC’s data was represented, but the ABC’s own analysis was also provided, projecting a winner or result. Calls of individual seats were not made on the broadcast but were in the first instance disseminated through the online system. A bar with rotating summaries of district results (linked to on-screen discussion where appropriate, such as at 6:42pm) also appeared during the broadcast (usually in conjunction with the “seats won” graphic in the lower third), enabling integration between the online results and on-screen discussion (Images 2, 3). Across both the broadcast and digital dissemination, the ABC sought to boundary-blur as discussed by Chadwick (2017: 175).

Disseminating Results through Interactive Media

The ABC's analysis of results was disseminated through social media in a way that was designed to encourage discursive contributions to the overall coverage. Once sufficient results had been obtained (approximately 6:50pm), ABC News' Facebook account began an election night live-stream, but rather than streaming the television broadcast, it was a complete live feed of results as they were received without commentary (ABC News 2019). Digital editor Brad Ryan suggests that this approach was borne of the different requirements and behaviours of online audiences:

We know that the audience behaves differently—people using digital now are primarily on their mobile phones, so they're often tapping in and out, they're checking things throughout the night; we can see from the engagement time data that most people aren't watching passively—they're coming in, clicking around, having a look and going away again. (Ryan 2019)

The live feed had comments enabled, allowing Facebook viewers (unlike the TV broadcast or ABC website) to contribute to a public discourse as results were received in real time, echoing Rowland's observation that the different media "complement" each other and serve different purposes (Rowland 2019). However, tweets were not used on the election night broadcast - normally a mainstay of interaction at the ABC - indicating a resistance to hybrid media logics. The plan was to have more control by using a "You Ask, We Answer" program to garner questions, and while they "had six questions ready to go [...] the result happened so quickly that [Clark] completely forgot. And they were all irrelevant anyway, because nobody expected it to be as decisive as it was" and so they were not broadcast. Hybridity often focuses on how "informal online media discourse" has begun to intrude upon conventional broadcast norms and logics (Chadwick 2017: 203), but this was limited in this case. Similarly, the ABC New Twitter account only Tweeted 2 times using #vicvotes compared with 50 tweets by 7 News, and of the 8 ABC panellists only Rowland tweeted using the hashtag.

Hybrid interactions did occur on the ABC Melbourne's Facebook page. Several live videos were posted during which presenters—*prima facie* "behind the scenes" of the TV coverage—interacted with Facebook commenters on screen, answered questions and gave 'shout outs' to viewers (ABC Melbourne 2019). Simultaneously, the page urged commenters to "ask Mary [the presenter] your questions here!", in a direct invitation to intervene in the coverage. At the same time, the ABC Melbourne Facebook page continued to interact with viewers in the comments of those live streams, enabling a real-time discourse to develop.

We find that hybrid logics did occur, in part because their attempt to influence network media and assert control over how social media was deployed within the broadcast created new, hybrid logics (Chadwick 2017: 184). The ABC attempted to understand the different logics of each platform and produce discrete approaches to each. Individual preferences also played a role, but at the margins. Green, for example, noted that he had "very little to do with social media on the night" partly because he was "too busy doing television and analysing numbers" but also because Twitter is "too brief and unsubtle a medium to carry detailed messages" that psephology sometimes requires.

"What are you hearing?"

While the primary source of information is the VEC data, politicians and journalists on the broadcast contributed information via their personal and Twitter networks using smartphones in hybrid ways. Indeed, all political panellists were observed using their mobile phones. John Pesutto, for example, used a mobile phone stand (6:41pm) for easy readability and panellists frequently referred to information they received with Jane Hume shown using her phone at 7:21pm. The journalists also used their phones to communicate with sources, engage on Twitter and other platforms, and even to receive messages from off-screen producers:

Everything that's going on in individual seats, voting trends, this candidate spat the dummy on this issue, this candidate's so happy she's crying on that seat—that information's fed to us either through our earpiece, through texts, through emails on mobile phones, emails on our computer screens.
(Rowland 2019)

"I've texted Rowly [Michael Rowland] on air. I've tried to get him on comms, and he couldn't hear me, so he texted me and said, "what was that?" and I just texted him." (Clark 2019)

As previously noted, Clark finds the on-screen phone use almost preferable:

"I actually quite like seeing a journalist or a politician sitting behind the desk, clearly getting a message... that's great. That's immediate, I like journalists doing that as well, during spills and things. Seeing them, going "I've just got a text from a senior government source who says," I think that stuff's quite good. (Clark 2019)

This appears to be a normalisation of hybridity, or in Chadwick's (2017) terms, it indicates that it is not ad hoc but systemic and sought out behaviour from producers and arguably has become an election night routine.

Michael Kroger's Resignation

The scale of the landslide against the Liberal Party prompted recriminations from party insiders. A political information cycle (Chadwick 2017: 73–5) developed around calls for Michael Kroger, President of the Liberal Party, to resign. The cycle began as the size of the Liberal defeat became clear. After Antony Green's call of the election at 7:20pm, anchor Tamara Oudyn attempts to frame the 'meaning' of the election as declarative of the Liberal Party's future—both in terms of its tangible effects, and what it says more broadly about the current trajectory of both the Labor and Liberal Parties. Neither Pesutto nor Jane Hume would contemplate policy or personnel changes in the Liberal Party, while Labor's Jill Hennessy calls the night a "crossroads of existentialism" to which Rowland responds with technical journalism and insider language: "there's the grab!"—recognition that there is an imperative to find a "punchy" cut-through soundbite.

Shortly after this, however, another soundbite really cut through. Jeff Kennett, former Liberal Premier of Victoria, declared on Channel 7 that Kroger must resign by midnight. The speed at which Kennett's call ricocheted across the media landscape is notable: the intervention itself, social media reactions to that intervention, and the ABC's pivot to discussing that intervention all occur within the space of a few minutes. Notable too is Kennett's deadline—"before midnight"—injecting immediacy and urgency to his call. Immediacy is not *sufficient* for a political information cycle to exist, but it is a natural by-product (Chadwick 2017: 64).

Rowland—having prior knowledge that Pesutto and Kroger belonged to different factions of the Liberal Party—immediately questions Pesutto on Kroger's viability as President of the

party. This ‘chase’ culminates in Pesutto, a then-senior member of the parliamentary party, conceding that “the party needs to take urgent action” and that “everything needs to be reviewed”—contributing more material to the political information cycle as it develops across different broadcasts and other platforms. While Kroger’s future was being debated on Twitter prior to Kennett’s intervention, speculation soared after it. For example, Matt Golding, political cartoonist for *The Age* newspaper shared a quickly completed cartoon on Twitter of Kroger’s face with a bullseye superimposed, and a thought bubble saying: “I think I’m about to be Jeffed” (Golding 2018). The tweet gathers five replies, 24 retweets and 76 favourites. The event, however, is mostly driven by the contributions of journalists, politicians and other elites on television broadcasts and this helped it to reverberate through the Twittersphere (Burgess and Bruns 2012) - though it is not shown on the ABC broadcast.

The fallout from Kennett’s comments became a major focus for the broadcast as the political information cycle developed. Kennett’s declaration (with response from Kroger) was uploaded to Facebook by Channel Seven, gathering 110 reactions and 55 comments (Seven News 2018). This prioritisation of both immediacy and boundary-blurring suggests a political information cycle, though largely driven by elite sources. After the often hybrid commentary across multiple platforms, triggered by one panellist on one broadcast, Kroger’s resignation is tendered a few days later.

The Member for Hawthorn (Former)

Political panellists on results programs serve several purposes—from ‘spinning’ an election to providing their own unguarded political analysis - but parties rarely put forward politicians who are in danger of losing their seat. The ABC panellists were uniformly from “safe seats” (defined as where the leading candidate has over 60% of the vote in the two-candidate-preferred count - AEC 2019). However, in a significant and ‘unprecedented’ upset John Pesutto lost his seat on “live national television” (Rowland 2019).

The fall of Hawthorn diffused across several moments and “check-ins” of the count; this diffusion allowed the event to progress rather than occurring at once. In earlier check-ins, Green suggests that while the early returns in Hawthorn look troubling for Pesutto, the fact that they are early makes them easier to dismiss. Again, Green’s constructed position as election interpreter allows the ABC and Green to shape the flow of the cycle, and Green shows an awareness of how his power in the system has the potential to overwhelm other actors and the media cycle:

I made that decision [to keep Pesutto in doubt] because I didn't want to--if I had said we think that John Pesutto's been defeated in Hawthorn, that would've dominated the panel for the next half [sic] panel, and so I left it in doubt until I was a bit more certain. In fact, the thing was right all along. In a situation like that, you stay a little more cautious. (Green 2019)

Pesutto eventually appeared defeated just before 10pm, giving the ABC valuable time to prepare for the story, which was pushed through multiple channels. Online news articles were written up and published by 10:35pm, shortly after the ABC broadcast ended. The online article was framed as Pesutto losing his seat *live on the ABC’s coverage* and was embedded with a three-minute clip of Pesutto learning his fate and several tweets from non-elite observers reacting to the event. The article was shared widely on social media, perpetuating and reiterating the cycle (Chadwick 2017: 64). Of the 168 Tweets that mentioned Pesutto, 72 focused on his election loss, with 39 Tweets specifically adopting the ‘on live TV’ frame.

Other news organisations followed suit, but again the focus was not on the loss, but that he lost his seat on live TV (Yeo 2018). This process disregards the ‘boundaries’ of different

media and communicative methods—and is an example of the “not only, but also” nature of this election night coverage (Chadwick 2017: 10). These events also reflect some of what Chadwick describes as the “norms” of hybridity in a journalistic and news context: the ABC’s attempts to immediately disseminate the story and frame it in their terms reflect an increasing adoption of the “temporal rhythms” of online media (Chadwick 2017: 188). Here, the logics of newer media find themselves co-opted by the older to create a new, hybrid logic.

The extent to which this event reflected the changing nature of the media system is acknowledged by those involved. Rowland (2019) identified this event (alongside Kroger) as an example of a more “dynamic” news cycle and election night coverage. While the 24-hour news cycle is “still there”, other media have transformed how that cycle operates in hybrid ways:

I think it's become a lot more immediate, a lot less clunky, a lot less stolid than it has been in the past pre-social media. Much more incredibly dynamic: we'll often have tweets, if they're really good tweets, on the strap on the bottom of the screen.” (Rowland 2019)

Nevertheless, the hybridity was mediated by the decision to not push the story earlier by Green, which also allowed time for the ABC to prepare - an important process news value - and because they did not use twitter reactions for this election, which was again linked to news value choices in the planning and production stage.

Conclusion

The media system of the 2018 Victorian state election night coverage was complex. The findings largely support and reinforce Chadwick’s theory of the hybrid media system, but there were some notable and important differences. Hybridity manifested in how election results were disseminated and interpreted; how the ABC broadcast, adapted and integrated their coverage across different interactive platforms; and in how fast-paced, breaking-news events such as the call of the election, the loss of a prominent incumbent, and the call for Kroger’s resignation spiralled into political information cycles.

This case study highlights what Chadwick (2017: 286) described as the “ongoing power of professional broadcasting and newspaper organizations, who are in many respects successfully co-opting newer media logics for their own purposes, while at the same time restating and renewing the logics that sustained their dominance throughout the twentieth century”. Yet there were also differences. We contend that “power diffusion” was weaker in this case than Chadwick (2017: 288) found for “news making”, with fewer chances for non-elites to intervene. The broadcast media played a central, arguably dominant, role in election night reportage. They seemed to drive online conversation rather than empower it, with limited audience input and a relatively constrained social media debate with journalists and politicians largely the key actors (e.g. Matt Golding’s cartoon). This difference might be explained by three factors. First, the decision of the VEC to maintain a subscription model that controlled the flow of results, alongside restrictions at polling stations, limited hybridity, empowering traditional media and related logics, and constraining the space for newer media to intervene in the political information cycle (at least when not driven by the broadcast coverage and other elites). Second, wider institutional dynamics impacted the nature of the hybrid media system, which served to “mediate eventual outcomes” in important ways (Anstead and Chadwick 2009: 58). Australia’s concentrated media ownership, compulsory voting and, especially, the sheer complexity of the electoral system and count process were important in this – with experts such as Antony Green a focal point for the online debates. Third, the ABC chose to limit the use of public tweets on its election broadcast, with formal

interaction focused on Facebook, and Twitter used as an elite news source by panellists. Newsroom processes were found in some ways to open up opportunity for hybrid logics, and in other ways constrain them.

While the findings of this study are significant, it is limited by the use of a single country case study and by its focus on the ABC; the inclusion of commercial and alternative media and more details on the role of Facebook would strengthen the analysis. Future studies might explore election night broadcasts in other contexts, paying close attention to how institutional factors impact the construction (or not) of a hybrid media system.

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