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Home > Ideology-Driven Telecommunications Market Leads to a Second-Rate Outcome

Ideology-Driven Telecommunications Market Leads to a Second-Rate Outcome

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Editorial

Abstract

Papers in the December 2020 issue of the Journal include a discussion about the parlous state of television broadcasting in Australia, 6G and the future of the National Broadband Network. The digital economy is a focus, with papers on tax risk assessment and assurance and the use of e-commerce by MSEs in Indonesia. Global telecommunications markets are struggling to move beyond the 20th century thinking and ideology-driven decision making that pervades many governments. Telecommunications use has surged as work from home has become normalised, yet the digital divide and second-rate outcomes abound as the result of poor decision making by government. Dr Leith Campbell takes over as the Managing Editor in January 2021. The Journal welcomes contributions on telecommunications and the digital economy.

In This Issue

In this issue of the *Journal* papers cover the NBN Futures Forum on a national broadband strategy for Australia, the state of television broadcasting in Australia and what should happen next, and a cyber and critical technology strategy towards 6G. The digital economy is a focus with a discussion on tax risk assessment and assurance reform and the use of e-commerce by MSEs in Indonesia. A review of network traffic anomaly detection is included, and historical papers look back at the Bellenden Ker television broadcasting station in north Queensland.

Should TV Move? provides a discussion about the unprecedented threats to broadcast television's business model, the global picture for terrestrial TV broadcasting and options for modernising the Australian system.

Gap between Regions in the Use of E-Commerce by MSEs examines the adoption of e-commerce by MSEs in different provinces in Indonesia.

A Review of Current Machine Learning Approaches for Anomaly Detection in Network Traffic provides a comprehensive survey to give a broad perspective of recent research in the area of anomaly detection.

Tax Risk Assessment and Assurance Reform in Response to the Digitalised Economy focuses on the global reform that took place among tax authorities from a tax risk management and assurance perspective. The research results suggest an imbalance in reform among participants from developed and developing economies.

On Australia's Cyber and Critical Technology International Engagement Strategy Towards 6G reviews the most critical technologies; related risks and opportunities; best practices, policies and security frameworks in other countries; relevant government, industry, civil society and academia cooperation initiatives; and proposes how Australia may become a leader in the global Cyberspace.

The Bellenden Ker Television Project presents two historic papers from 1974/75 detailing the construction of the Bellenden Ker television broadcasting station in far north Queensland.

The NBN Futures Forum: Towards a National Broadband Strategy for Australia, 2020-2030 promoted the concept of an overarching National Broadband Strategy to achieve social, economic and governmental goals.

Towards a National Broadband Strategy for Australia, 2020-2030 examines the current state and desirable future of broadband services in Australia.

Ideology-Driven Telecommunications Market Leads to a Second-Rate Outcome

The Minister for Communications, Paul Fletcher, recently announced that the National Broadband Network (NBN) is built and fully operational. What this declaration does not say is whether the NBN is world-class and going to meet the nation's telecommunication needs for the 21st century.

The Minister's declaration is the first step required under the relevant legislation for the NBN to be sold off. It is reasonable then to reflect on the outcomes of the ten-year NBN rollout.

As nationally important infrastructure, the original goals for the NBN have not been met. Rather than providing a ubiquitous national fibre network, the NBN is now a patchwork of technologies, including copper-based technologies that are sub-standard, expensive and obsolete.

NBN Co, the government business enterprise, is responsible for the NBN rollout and its operation until the NBN is sold off. NBN Co has failed to achieve most metrics, and this failure has been brought on principally by the Coalition Government's decision in 2014 to force NBN Co to adopt an ideology driven business model and obsolete technologies. NBN Co has overspent, and continues to do so, and this growing debt means that the cost of the NBN to consumers is far higher than it should be. The Board of NBN Co now appears to be focused on enterprise products as a way to make up the shortfall; however, it is unlikely that any revenue gained will be directed to completing the original design.

It is anticipated that the Coalition Government will sell off the NBN after the next election, if it retains government, utilizing the disaggregation model that it favours. It has consistently said it will do so, but the ideology driving the Coalition government's decision making is wrong. There are times when the needs of the many should take precedence over the competitive and piecemeal business models for government services that appear to be favoured by conservatives globally, not just in Australia. As with the COVID-19 pandemic, an approach that favours lives (the many) over other considerations will require the Federal Government to inject the funds and resources necessary to ensure a successful outcome.

The Australian telecommunications market is dysfunctional, with unnecessary infrastructure duplication, over-pricing, poor reliability and a lack of world-class services. The digital divide continues unabated due to the failed telecommunication policies that have been a foundation of the telecommunications market since the deregulation process began in the early 1990s.

Whether it be a digital divide between urban, regional and remote areas, or the digital divide between those that can afford the exorbitant prices for telecommunications and those that cannot, Australia has little to show for a decade in which telecommunications was finally acknowledged to be an essential service.

Government intervention occurs in nearly every aspect of our lives, as it should. The key to successful government intervention is to be open about the desired outcome of the intervention and to willingly accept review, debate and criticism.

It is now more than six years since reviews and audits by the government and NBN Co were carried out in late 2013 and early 2014, yet the government and NBN Co are steadfastly refusing under FoI to make available the full reports, the input data and models. In a democracy this level of government obstruction is destructive.

Global telecommunication markets are evolving through the introduction of 5G, satellite constellations, AI/ML and edge computing.

The Australian telecommunications market needs urgent reform to ensure that it is open, fair and competitive. A good starting point, not just for the telecommunications market, would be to ensure that taxation is paid in Australia on transactions for products and services. It is vital that the offshoring of credit card transactions to avoid local taxation be prevented.

A model that places the focus on what is best for the nation and consumers, the motivation for the original NBN design, is required. A world-leading telecommunications market is a fundamental requirement for a nation to achieve societal and economic success in the 21st century.

The NBN is a fundamental enabler of our connected society in the 21st century. It is wrong to accept the Government's statement that the NBN is built and fully operational. It is not and will not be until the original design is completed and the government mandates an end to the digital divide.

Ideology is a poor platform for decision making.

The *Journal*, Looking Forward

Stepping down as Managing Editor

After 24 issues as the Managing Editor of the *Journal*, I have decided to step down. Over the past six years, the *Journal* has had a name change, moved to an online paper management system and streamlined processes. Successful inclusion in the Scopus journal index led to a Q2 ranking, an outcome that is welcomed and ensures that the *Journal* will continue to attract high quality papers from around the world.

I am pleased to note that Dr Leith Campbell, an Adjunct Professor at RMIT University, has agreed to take over as the Managing Editor of the *Journal*. Leith has kindly filled the role of copyeditor and Deputy Managing Editor for several years.

My heartfelt thank-you goes to the Editorial Advisory Board members, without whom the *Journal* would not have moved forward so successfully over the past six years. It is the positive support offered by the multidisciplinary and experienced Editorial Advisory Board that makes the *Journal* a key focal point for the reporting of research, discussion and public policy debate on telecommunications and the digital economy.

Looking forward

The *Journal* welcomes papers on telecommunications and the digital economy, including, theory, public policy, reviews and tutorials, and case studies.

Technological change is happening at a rapid rate and consumers anticipate that governments and industry keep pace to ensure that the benefits can be fully utilised. The *Journal* is calling for papers on how new technologies will affect Australian telecommunications consumers.

The topics of *International Telecommunications Legislation and Regulations* and *International Mobile Cellular Regulation and Competition* are set to continue for some time, as the opportunity to attract papers from around the globe continues. We encourage papers that reflect on where the global telecommunications market is now, how it got to where it is, and what is going to happen next.

Papers are invited for upcoming issues. With your contributions, the *Journal* will continue to provide readers with exciting and informative papers covering a range of local and international topics. The Editorial Advisory Board also values input from our readership, so please let us know what themes you would like to see in the coming year.

All papers related to telecommunications and the digital economy are welcome and will be considered for publication after the double-blind peer-review process.

Mark A. Gregory

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