

Telecommunications is an Essential Service

Editorial

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Abstract: The Australian Government has responded to the Productivity Commission inquiry into the Universal Service Obligation (USO). The primary issues identified by the Government include the cost of providing the USO and how its provision might be competitively distributed. Secondary issues and issues that did not get mentioned include improved access to telecommunications (and broadband) for the socially disadvantaged, improved service reliability and quality and an acknowledgement that telecommunications is an essential service. Over the next decade telecommunications will take centre stage as the way that we live, interact with our family and friends and the things around us changes faster than at any time in history. Papers in the December 2017 issue of the Journal cover historical events, book reviews and international telecommunications markets including a unique look at the development of the telecommunications market in Canada.

In This Issue

In this issue, the *Journal* includes topical articles that cover international telecommunications, historical events and a book review on preparing the next generation for the Machine Age.

Preparing the next generation for the Machine Age is a book review of 'Changing Jobs. The Fair Go in the Machine Age' by Jim Chalmers and Mike Quigley.

Alice Springs Telecommunication Facilities are two papers from 1939 and 1990 that describe and contrast the telecommunications facilities and lifestyles at Alice Springs.

Telstra's Future Mode of Operation - the transformation of the Telstra's Network - 1992/93 provides a striking insight into the telecommunications market deregulation and how Telstra's Future Mode of Operation strategy was implemented.

Historical paper: The 2004 Proposal for the Structural Separation of Telstra re-presents the paper 'Revisiting the Structural Separation of Telstra' published in the Spring 2004 issue. This

paper presented the policy rationale for structural separation, and detailed how it could have been achieved.

Tony Newstead (1923-2017) is an obituary for Mr Tony Newstead, who passed away on 6 November 2017. Mr Newstead was a pioneering figure in Australian and worldwide telecommunications network planning, as well as in Australian trad jazz as both a trumpeter and early bandleader. This obituary attempts to do justice to his career in both fields. In an Attachment, Dr Clemens Pratt provides a short memoir in appreciation of Tony's role as his career mentor and colleague, and John Burke provides an appreciation of Tony's innovatory role in pioneering open planning in Australian telecommunications.

An Introduction to Telecommunications Policy in Canada provides an introduction to telecommunications policy in Canada, outlining the regulatory and legislative environment governing the provision of telecommunications services in the country and describing basic characteristics of its market for retail telecommunications services. The discussion focuses on broad trends and major players and identifies key regulations and policies in place in 2017, with information drawn primarily from regulatory and policy documents.

The Potential for Immersive Technology combined with Online Dating provides an insight into online dating and how immersive technologies are now being incorporated into online dating systems. The first forays into immersive VR online dating have only just being made in the past year. To what degree this type of technology will change the way that we date is potentially quite different from the current way that online dates are conducted. The way the technology works could make virtual dates seem as real as a physical date. Understanding how immersive technology functions gives some insights into the future of online dating and also the impact on the digital economy.

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The Australian Government response (2017) to the Productivity Commission inquiry on the Universal Service Obligation (USO) (2017) has failed to address key issues that were identified by the Productivity Commission and has instead focused narrowly on the cost and provision of the USO.

There is the potential for the government's focus to miss the point of the USO, and to fail to identify the need for the USO's scope to increase rather than decrease over the coming decades. This is not to argue that the cost to provide the USO should increase if the USO's scope is enhanced, but that there needs to be an improved USO as a result of the proposed changes to the way that the USO is delivered.

The cost of providing telecommunications is decreasing, yet Australia remains one of the most expensive telecommunications markets in the world. The reason for this is not because Australia is a geographically large nation nor is it the population size. Australia suffers from the 'Australia tax', multi-nationals that fail to pay their fair share of tax, corporations that fail to reasonably contribute towards research and development, and multi-nationals that treat Australia as a backwater branch office. The challenge for government is to tackle the underlying problems holding the telecommunications market back.

Advances in telecommunications and computing technologies have facilitated the technological society. Over the next decade, the way that we live and interact with the things around us will be fundamentally changed.

Telecommunications is an essential service. It will only be when this reality is recognised by government that telecommunications policy direction will focus on outcomes that are in the nation's best interest.

The government has an opportunity through USO reform to begin the process of bringing improved telecommunications to all Australians, irrespective of where they live and work and their degree of social advantage or disadvantage.

The Journal, Looking Forward

The digital economy is growing at a spectacular rate. Australians should benefit from increased competition among retailers due to Amazon's decision to take a more active role here. Papers are sought that explore the digital economy and its shifting landscape.

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 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 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.

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References

Productivity Commission. (2017). Inquiry into the Telecommunications Universal Service Obligation. 19 June 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/telecommunications#report>

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