Guest Editor's Introduction to the Special Issue: Multi-platform Strategies

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For anyone interested in analyzing the strategies of media organisations, one of the most noteworthy and prevalent trends of recent years has been a tendency towards adoption of a 'multi-platform' approach to production and distribution of content, i.e. an approach that embraces multiple possible means and modes of dissemination. In most developed media economies, multi-platform strategies have become a core part of how media companies are adjusting to growth of the internet and digital convergence. Media firms are increasingly adopting a so-called multi-platform outlook and, in the television industry for example, this has been characterised both by the introduction of multi-platform commissioning (Sørensen, 2014) and the development of websites and other digital offerings capitalizing on popular content brands (Doyle, 2010). A multi-platform approach generally means that new ideas for content are considered in the context of a wide range of distribution possibilities and not just a single one such as print or linear broadcast.

Questions about the nature and the significance of multi-platform media strategies are high on the research agenda of fields including media management, media business studies and media economics as is reflected, for example, in the recurrence of 'multi-platform' as a thematic focus in many recent conferences and workshops, including the European Media Management Association annual conference 2014 in Tallinn, Estonia. In addition, interest amongst industry participants, media business strategists and policy-makers in understanding what is driving organisations, across sectors and across the globe, to embark on multi-platform strategies and what the implications of these strategies may be has never been higher. At a time of concern

about how incumbent media organizations can adjust successfully to advancing technology, this special issue of the *Journal of Media Business Studies* draws together a range of scholarly work that contributes to a fuller analytical understanding of the use and potential advantages of multi-platform strategies in the context of a rapidly evolving media ecology.

Building on a strong tradition of research into how technological convergence is affecting newsrooms and news production practices (Achtenhagen and Raviola, 2009; Deuze, 2008; Domingo, 2008; Erdal, 2011; Schlesinger and Doyle, 2014; Steensen, 2009), Juliane Lischka's article investigates the extent to which, for business journalists working at German-language newspapers in Switzerland, shifting to a multi-platform approach helps to overcome potentially counter-productive rigidities in work routines and procedures. Lishka's survey reveals that whereas age and gender have little bearing on the propensity for journalistic staff to be innovative, flexible and collaborative in their approach to work, levels of seniority and, in particular, whether the newsroom has been re-structured are influential factors. She concludes that a converged multi-platform strategy is likely to be helpful in overcoming procedural inertia and promoting innovation.

Tim Dwyer's article also examines how news production is affected by the transition to multi-platform and the drive to a 'digital first' approach. Dwyer is concerned not only with how this is affecting processes and cultures of production but also audience access to content. Drawing on original findings from an analysis of a number of Asian news media organisations, Dwyer examines how, as delivery of news is extended to mobile platforms, the production, packaging and consumption of news is changing. Echoing the findings of other recent research into the effects of digital and multi-platform delivery on diversity within news provision (Fenton, 2010), he argues that more attention needs to be paid to, the effects of the rising popularity of major aggregator distributors on digital news ecologies and on audience access to diverse content.

As the title suggests 'Multi-platform media and the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes' also underlines critical questions about the implications for content diversity and for policy of an ever-growing commitment to multi-platform strategies. Based on empirical findings from a

multiple case study analysis involving television, newspaper and magazine companies in the UK, Doyle's article analyses the key considerations that are shaping the adoption of multi-platform strategies and how this outlook is bringing about renewal through new patterns of investment in jobs and equipment and, crucially, how it is fuelling a re-conceptualised approach to what the business of supplying media is centrally about and to content decisions. The article argues that the transition to a multi-platform environment has precipitated a vast expansion in the volumes of media being supplied by media organisations to their audiences and, while this partly reflects increases in productivity stemming from new equipment and work practices, it also reflects relatively widespread strategies of recycling of content output within and across platforms.

Felix Sattelberger's article is less concerned with how conditions surrounding production and distribution of media content are affected by the transition to multi-platform but instead focuses on how multiple digital communication platforms can be harnessed in support of more effective marketing strategies for media content properties. Drawing on a recent survey of data about pre-release marketing communications for a number of films released in Germany, Sattelberger analyses the use of multi-platform communication strategies to market feature films. He finds a high degree of interchangeability and path dependency within patterns of communication behaviour across differing platforms and assesses what this implies for successful use of online media in pre-release marketing strategies.

As is evident from the range of organisational case studies examined in this special issue, multi-platform strategies can vary widely in terms of the sorts of media products and services being supplied, the combination of delivery platforms being used, the nature of the economic opportunities being pursued and the level of investment and experimentation involved. Multi-platform strategies and their impact are also inevitably shaped by distinctive market and organisational circumstances. Case studies examined in this special issue come from several different sectors including news production, feature films, magazines and television and from a variety of geographic and market settings including Germany, the UK and Switzerland, Hong Kong, South Korea, the PRC and Japan. Their analysis is enriched by reliance on a diversity of disciplinary perspectives and tools. Notwithstanding such diversity, findings presented about

how the adoption of multi-platform strategies is playing out in differing organisational and market settings offer some valuable insights into how exactly the prevalent trend towards multi-platform expansion is promoting organisational adjustment and renewal and what the implications may be, including for policy.

Ross Biggam's contribution, drawing on many years of experience of analyzing EU media-related policy initiatives, adds a valuable and welcome contemporary 'industry' perspective on the implications of transition to a multi-platform environment. Biggam's article analyzes media policy developments in Brussels and asks whether EU audiovisual policy infrastructure has become outdated by digital convergence and the widespread adoption of multi-platform strategies across European member states and beyond. He addresses this by providing a forensic but clear and insightful original analysis of key elements of current and recent EU audiovisual policy, explaining what the main battle lines are the issues at stake for media business and consumers.

Findings presented in this special issue suggest that perceived opportunities to make better use of production and delivery resources, content assets and/or relationships with audiences are key incentives for the move to multi-platform, and, as an increasing number of media suppliers embrace this approach, this is affecting all aspects of the business from strategic and operational to financial and marketing. Albeit that the work assembled in this issue usefully extends existing research and theorizing related to, for example, the role of multi-platform strategies in promoting renewal and innovation within media organisations, it remains that this complex and timely theme deserves much more attention from scholars of media business studies and is likely to reward such attention. Key questions that ought to be addressed in new empirical studies include how a multi-platform approach is improving the organization of work and usage of resources by media businesses; how the transition to distribution across multiple digital platforms is enabling media producers and suppliers to understand and serve audience demands more effectively; how media companies can best utilise the large amounts of return path data now at their disposal; and how public policy at national and transnational level needs to evolve further in order to remain in step with the contingencies of a multi-platform environment.

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