Digital Platform Regulation: Beyond Transparency and ‘Openness’

International Communication Association 2020 Post-Conference

*Gold Coast, Australia*

**Date:** Tuesday 26 May

**Location:** Function Room - G42_4.23, Griffith University Gold Coast Campus, 1 Parklands Drive, Southport, Gold Coast (venue accessible from Broadbeach via G-Link light rail).

**Post-conference website:** https://research.qut.edu.au/digitalplatformreg

**Post-Conference Organizers:** Professor Terry Flew (Queensland University of Technology), Dr. Fiona Martin (University of Sydney) and Dr. Rosalie Gillett (Queensland University of Technology).

**ICA division affiliations:** Communications Law and Policy Division, and the Media Industries Interest Group of the ICA

**Institutional sponsors:** Australian Research Council, Queensland University of Technology Digital Media Research Centre, Griffith University Centre for Social and Cultural Research, University of Sydney Department of Media and Communication.

**Post-conference objectives**
The last five years have seen a sea change in debates around regulation of digital platforms. There is a growing view that nation-state regulation is warranted to address public concerns about the market power, lack of accountability and lack of transparency of the leading tech giants. This symposium will bring together communications and media policy and industry researchers to consider critical issues around digital platform regulation.

**Post-conference description**
As online activities and experiences are increasingly mediated through digital platforms, a series of scandals and ‘public shocks’ (Ananny & Gillespie, 2017) have raised concerns about privacy and security, the misuse of user data, algorithmic biases, and the public distribution of
objectionable and sometimes abhorrent content through the internet (Flew, Martin, & Suzor, 2019). Legislators and regulators in many countries are now engaged in public inquiries and the development of new laws to apply public interest standards to digital platforms, as First Amendment arguments about freedom of online expression and claims that the platforms are simply intermediaries are increasingly under challenge (Napoli, 2019). Leading scholars have identified digital platforms as being central to 21st century communication and media policy (Just & Puppis, 2018; Picard & Pickard, 2017), and debates about the relationship between individual rights and social responsibilities for digital platforms have been noticeably shifting from the quasi-libertarian logics of only a decade ago (Gillespie, 2018).

At the same time, there is a lack of consensus about what digital platform regulation could, or should involve. It is unclear, for instance, whether it should involve a refining of existing forms of communications and media policy to incorporate the role now played by digital platforms as quasi-publishers of increasingly popular digital media content, or whether the principal issues such as monopoly power and consumer protection are best addressed by variants of economic policy e.g. proposals to treat digital platforms as ‘information fiduciaries’ in their handling of user data (Balkin, 2018; Dobkin, 2018). The balance between nation-state regulation and supranational governance is also a subject of considerable debate, as is the extent to which ‘soft law’, and platform-brokered arrangements such as the Twitter Trust & Safety Council and the proposed Facebook Oversight board may substitute for nation-state regulation. At a time of growing tensions among leading world powers, the divergence between forms of internet governance, and the possibility of a global ‘splinternet’ also needs to be considered (Mueller, 2017).

Possible topics to be discussed at the event include:

- The relationship between digital platforms and traditional media industries
- Platformization of the Internet and its implications for online speech and digital content regulation
- Public interest rationales for regulation in an age of digital platforms
- The economics of digital platforms and questions of market power in multisided markets
- Applicability of media and communications laws, policies and regulations to digital platforms
- Comparative international studies of digital platform regulations
- Divergence in digital media policies and the prospects of a global ‘splinternet’
• Models of regulation, including self-regulation, co-regulation and ‘soft law’, and their applicability to digital platforms
• Questions of trust relating to digital platform regulation
• Implications of populist politics for digital platform regulation.

Confirmed speakers:

Peng Hwa Ang, Nanyang Technological University
Sandra Braman, Texas A&M University
Stuart Cunningham, Queensland University of Technology
Tim Dwyer, University of Sydney
David Hesmondhalgh, University of Leeds
Peter Lewis, Essential
Ramon Lobato, RMIT University
Sora Park, University of Canberra
Victor Pickard, University of Pennsylvania
Nicolas Suzor, Queensland University of Technology
Josef Trappel, University of Salzburg
Krisztina Rozgonyi, University of Vienna
Dwayne Winseck, Carleton University

Submission and participation details

For any enquiries and to submit your extended abstract, please email Dr. Rosalie Gillett at digitalplatformregulation@qut.edu.au.

We invite authors to submit abstracts of 300-500 words addressing conference objectives. We are particularly interested in diverse international and comparative perspectives on these topics. Please make sure you include a title for your abstract. Abstracts will be automatically excluded
that are poorly written, or do not address the themes of the post-conference. Abstract submissions will be reviewed and final decisions communicated by January 15th, 2020.

**Closing date for abstracts:** Friday, December 20, 2019.

**Author notifications:** Wednesday, January 15, 2020.

**Registration opens:** Wednesday, January 15, 2020.

**Registration deadline:** Thursday, April 30, 2020.

**Publication outcomes:** Publication outcomes under consideration include a special issue of the journal Global Perspectives on “Trust in the Digital Economy”, to be edited by Terry Flew and Sora Park, and a possible edited book.

**Registration fees:** The registration fees for the post-conference will be $US50 for those in full-time academic positions from Tier A countries, and $US30 those from Tier B and C countries, graduate students, and those in employment exception positions (adjunct, sessional and part-time positions). The registration fees will cover refreshments for two breaks and lunch. Information on ICA Country Tiers can be found at https://www.icahdq.org/page/tiers.

All attendees will need to create an ICA profile in order to register. We also expect that all presenters will attend the post-conference event for the full day. Speakers are expected to register for the event unless otherwise advised.