Som det nu är sammanfattas varje del, men det lämnas i hög grad till läsaren att dra de samlade analytiska slutsatserna.


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A strong Foundation for Further Research

Vilde Schanke Sundet
Making Sense of Mobile Media: Institutional Working Notions, Strategies and Actions in Convergent Media Markets

This thesis addresses the emergence of the Norwegian mobile media market over the period of a decade. It examines how the legacies of established institutions have influenced the strategies of incumbent companies in the media industry, how these institutions sought to make sense of changes that were underway in the industry, and how those working for these companies perceived these changes and translated them into strategies and actions.

In this study, mobile media are defined as ‘media content and services distributed to a mobile device’ and the thesis is the result of substantial empirical analysis undertaken during the first decade of the 2000s. It consists of three sole and three co-authored articles and what is called a ‘final contribution’. The latter offers a synthesis and an original theoretical framework which underpins the empirical analysis.

The empirical analysis focuses primarily on five Norwegian players in the mobile media market: Telenor (a telecoms operator), NRK (the public broadcaster), VG (a major tabloid newspaper), TV 2, (a commercial ‘hybrid’ broadcaster), and P4 (a national commercial radio station). The principle research questions in this study are, first, how did well-established media and telecoms institutions, with their legacies in traditional markets, perceive and facilitate mobile media developments during the first decade of the 2000s? And second, how are working notions, strategies and actions with respect to mobile media services related to general developments in a convergent media market.
In the course of her analysis, Sundet examines the early period of WAP-based information service development, involving the redistribution of existing media content on a new Internet platform, the changing perceptions of audience participation on the part of company executives and the way these influenced their efforts to involve audiences in interactive services, and the way the supply of different kinds of content (radio, broadcast, mobile and newspaper) was affected, and sometimes disrupted, by innovations in mobile media services.

The analytical framework draws on theories developed in the management of technological innovation tradition. For example, Sundet integrates Mintzberg’s (1998) arguments about the role of strategy within organizations, focusing on managers’ perspectives, plans and patterns of action, with Weick’s (2001) work on sensemaking which emphasises the cognitive frames that guide managers in their interpretation of the meaning of developments within and external to organisations. Whereas previous work using this kind of conceptual framework has been mainly backward looking aiming to explain past developments, Sundet develops her own concept of ‘working notions’ as a means to understand ongoing and future developments in the mobile media industry. In doing so, she is able to present an insightful account of the decision making processes that usually are hidden from view – the disagreements, hopes and fears about the likely impact of technological innovation. This theoretical perspective is integrated with insights from research in the media and communications field, especially works concerned with transformations in the way media scholars understand ‘the audience’ as active rather than as passive consumer of media content.

Sundet employs her framework to interpret a rich corpus of interview data and to compare and contrast the views of elite interviewees with secondary accounts drawn from documentary evidence. She shows, for instance, how mobile media service developers initially aimed to involve online participants in interactive web-based service and why they disagreed about the most effective strategies and the motivations of service users. She illustrates how managers’ perceptions were often strongly influenced by their past experiences with earlier generations of technology and services, and how the dynamic processes of innovation and creative service development resulted in both successes and failures.

The previously published articles on which Sundet draws include, first, her examination of the ‘dream of mobile media’. Here she examines new media platforms as channels of distribution and as channels of communication. She investigates how a move into the mobile media market was influenced by incumbent company goals for market expansion, showing how the companies sought to make the best of a new disruptive technology while simultaneously minimising the risk to their operations. She considers how managers understood the challenge of generating new sources of revenues and explains why they reached out to new user groups, especially the young, with campaigns aimed at convincing them of the necessity of being mobile.

The second article, ‘because they deserve it: audience participation as a strategic development area in the media industry’ (co-authored with Arnt Maasø and
Trine Syvertsen), looks at changing perceptions of the media, on the one hand, as reliable sources of information on social issues and, on the other, as generators of commercial profit. Here we see how perceptions seemed to change in the face of the opportunities presented by mobile media away from traditional values of credibility and trust and towards more risky strategies aimed for promoting brands and emphasising the diversity of available media channels.

A third article on ‘working notions of active audiences’ (co-authored with Espen Ytreberg), traces the way company managers took up the idea of media ‘active-ness’ in their bid to try to give the mobile media audience what they thought it wanted by constantly increasing the diversity of the content on offer and by adopting various strategies to tap into the audience’s emotional engagement with their services.

A fourth article examines ‘innovation and creativity at NRK’, this time focusing on the development of the new media platform as a home for new media genre. This sole authored article offers a detailed case study of NRK’s 2007 launch of the first video series (Rubenmann) on a mobile phone. The analysis shows how this became a multiplatform event with television serving as a promotion channel for the series and highlighting the early technical difficulties involving quality and the challenges of redefining the aims of service development.

The fifth article, ‘approaching the mobile media market: an analysis of strategic perspectives, plans and patterns in Telenor’s mobile football and mobile music service (also sole authored) sets out how the company tried innovate to create a new personal media platform and an, at the time, new form of peer-to-peer communication in two distinct areas. One involved the need for exclusivity of content, while the other involved non-exclusive subscription-based music streaming and downloading. In both cases, new approaches to payment had to be found and these are shown to have drawn on a variety of ‘working notions’.

The sixth and final article focuses on ‘established media and their preconditions for profitability’, providing a comparative analysis of the competitive conditions in the Norwegian newspaper, radio and television industries during a period of substantial flux. Co-authored with Arne Krumsvik, this paper challenges the idea that new media platforms will necessarily replace pre-existing ones. Sundet and Krumsvik demonstrate the heterogeneity of the industry, arguing that it is where new services substitute for existing ones that disruption to industry models is most destabilizing. However, even when services are perceived as substitutes, the outcomes depend on the respective bargaining power of direct competitors and new entrants and on how they strategically approach media consumers and advertisers.

The results of the interlinked research projects outlined in the six papers are integrated in the ‘final contribution’ of the thesis so as to highlight the uncertain dynamics of the innovation process that shaped the development of the mobile media market in Norway.

This thesis offers a strong foundation for further research aimed at understanding how company managers guide the innovation process, why their strategies
succeed or fail, and how executives learn and unlearn in ways that influence innovation outcomes in unexpected ways. This study does not focus on new entrants to the mobile media market during the period of concern or on the way public policy influenced the strategies and actions of the incumbents. It nevertheless provides much insight into why developments in the ‘new media’ industries are so often accompanied by reactions that veer between shock and hope, and between visionary and practical plans and actions. It challenges any claim that innovation is always progressive, showing how it affects far more than the company bottom line. This thesis will be instructive for all researchers who seek explanations for how change happens in a particularly turbulent industry sector.

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References:

Note:
1 WAP is Wireless Application Protocol, an early standard for accessing information using a mobile wireless network.

A Challenging Piece of Research
Andreas Ytterstad
Norwegian Climate Change Policy and the Media: Between Hegemony and Good Sense
PhD-avhandling, Det humanistiske fakultet, UiO 2012

Andreas Ytterstad has produced a very original, passionate, determined and intellectually challenging piece of research that seeks both to seize back the ideas of Antonio Gramsci for a militant media studies and to develop an approach to journalism that is neither fatalistic nor idealistic. Through an emphasis on the significance of ‘good sense’ as an ingredient in and engine of popular resistance to bourgeois hegemony, he deploys a range of epistemological and conceptual tools, through an analysis of media coverage of climate change, that insists on the importance of retaining an interest in ‘truth’ and ‘objectivity’, not simply as strategies or discourses to be employed in specific situations, but as guiding principles designed to assist the struggle for social change. The attempt to revive the use of ‘good sense’ (a concept somewhat underplayed in Peter Thomas’ otherwise majestic book, The Gramscian