

How to Change The World

7 Rules To Maximise Communication Power

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Seven proven strategic patterns, which deliver Communication Power quickly, reliably, and cost-effectively to communication practitioners.

Social issues, public relations and brand marketing professionals have, traditionally, spoken different languages, and operated in accordance with, differing world-views. Historically, practitioners of their respective crafts had access to, and knowledge of, specific and differentiated modes of action—different levers with which to change the world.

Increasingly however, these professionals—and the clients they serve—must operate in a world of more fluid boundaries, where the levers are increasingly various, more subtle, and in the control of an ever-wider range of formally- and informally-constituted organisational and individual actors.

To meet the challenges of today's network-mediated fast-flow world, contemporary practitioners—with varying degree of success—integrate data into their decision making. Their goal: to augment their expertise and experience with 'signals intelligence' gathered in—and distilled from—both personal and public spheres.

Strategise from Structure
Exploit engagement's nature

Engage with Engagement
Build on existing foundations

Contextualise Social
A place for social,
and social in its place

Embrace Gatekeepers
They are few, and significant

Weave a Helix
Engagement favours coalition

Be Global. Live Local
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Stay Human
Don't let the machines
have the last word

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Such exploitation of data is oft-framed as a revolution in process. However, practitioners of the communication 'arts' have long felt the appeal of a 'scientific' approach: from Edward Bernays (*Engineering of Consent*), through the provocations of Noam Chomsky (*Manufactured Consent*), to the contemporary work of Manuel Castells, rigorous thinkers have offered insight on the distribution of power across communication and social networks.

Their analyses have, mostly, drawn from psychological and social theory—long perceived (and often dismissed) as 'soft' sciences.

With the evolution of the field of Social Network Analysis from that of Sociometrics, and the automation of textual and discourse analysis through the fields of Computational Linguistics and Quantitative Narrative Analysis, it is now possible to scale up—and make more practically-applicable—important elements of these 'soft' sciences, in a robust, commercial setting. That is our approach.

We present here, learnings from our work across the private, public and NGO sectors, based on data accumulated from our analyses—in diverse languages and cultures—of many thousands of social, environmental, brand marketing and issues-management narratives.

We will see how real data supports, undermines, extends or refutes the beliefs and preconceptions of sophisticated real-world practitioners.

Our experience of analysis of communication networks, and the highly-engaging narratives they channel, offers consistent lessons.

About Us

What We Do

We measure engagement with online narratives across the Internet, including traditional and social media.

To undertake this, we start with a particular topic of interest, and examine where and how the content-creation on this topic occurs, across web sites, blogs, social and other media. We build a network graph—the narrative graph—to represent the deep structure of that topical content.

What We Find

Discrete structural characteristics for each narrative.

Over the course of many observations, we have identified repeating patterns and structures in that form, and have developed techniques to automatically categorise and describe narratives based on those structures.

What We Know

Crucially, these mathematical patterns correlate well with real-world engagement related to those narratives, and highlight the significant media, actors and topics through which engagement with those narratives drives attitudinal and behavioural change.

Hence, our automated analysis can, clearly and concisely, inform action.

1.

Strategise From Structure

Exploit engagement's nature

It is easy to be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of content created in our networked culture. Fast-flow social media, rolling news and the relentless visibility of events at many scales, from global to hyperlocal, can paralyse both will—and perceived ability—to act.

Analytics are needed. Volumetric measures—the yardsticks of buzz—fail to tell the whole of *any* tale.

Narratives, stories, themes and memes are not indivisible 'things' to be counted, amassed and weighed. Rather, they, by nature, are rich with deep internal structure — within that structure, patterns that repeat across narratives and over time.

With sufficient evidence and experiment, such patterns can be correlated with outcome: *this* pattern, *that* action taken by *these* actors; *this* outcome. From such analysis comes learning, and from such learning, indications of best practice.

In our model, every narrative can be characterised as *Transient*, *Tribal*, *Timeless* or *Transformative*, based on mathematical properties of the engagement engendered by it.

For each of those categories, there is strong evidence that there exists an optimal high-level strategic pattern to deploy, for a positive outcome (see right).

Narrative Typology

Transformational

- A very small number of narratives, campaigns or, indeed, brands.
- Characterised by intense, engaged individual experience with strong timeless themes.
- Fast-changing, yet potentially resulting in lasting transformation of the world.
- A volatile environment for the positioning of brands or themes for communications.
- Strong opportunity if there is positive alignment, or great threat if it is an opposed issue.
- Communication Power comes from detailed understanding of and alignment with, both the timeless drivers and the in-the-moment significant experiences of those connected to the narrative.

Timeless

- A small number of narratives, campaigns or, brands.
- Characterised by long-term, deep engagement, driven by a small number of key players who are often experts and authorities.
- These are authentic. They matter to people.
- They are long-lived. They are good choices for the positioning of brands or themes for communications
- As issues they are expected to persist or grow.
- They are high-value but difficult to own. Focus is key.
- Communication Power comes from the understanding of what has long-term significance, and alliance-building with the existing players.

Tribal

- A small number of narratives, campaigns or, indeed, brands.
- Characterised by intense debate.
- Personal experience often drives engagement. Commercial perspectives often drive divergent POVs.
- We see that the vast majority of this debate, this flow, has no impact: Indeed <<1% of content over any given period will have any significance.
- So, although it's easy to be a participant, it is far more difficult to be a player or leader, in this space.
- Leverage the power of authentic individual experience via sharing or aggregation/curation.
- Communication Power comes from an understanding of what is significant in the moment.

Transient

- The vast majority of narratives, campaigns or brands.
- They are narratives which will fall away without investment of time or resources.
- Strategically, these are often easy to 'own': but they must be driven (or connected) to greater relevance and/or differentiation to have long-term value.
- As existing campaigns or issues, they are worthy of tracking.
- Communication Power comes from building stronger connections to more engaging narratives.

2. Engage With Engagement Build on existing foundations

A common theme in communications planning is the necessity to 'create engagement'.

Generally, this is perceived as an up-hill task, powered by campaign-spend, media saturation, and a journey through the classic AIDA funnel—from the darkness of low awareness, to the light of action: product purchased, candidate elected, a movement created to change the world.

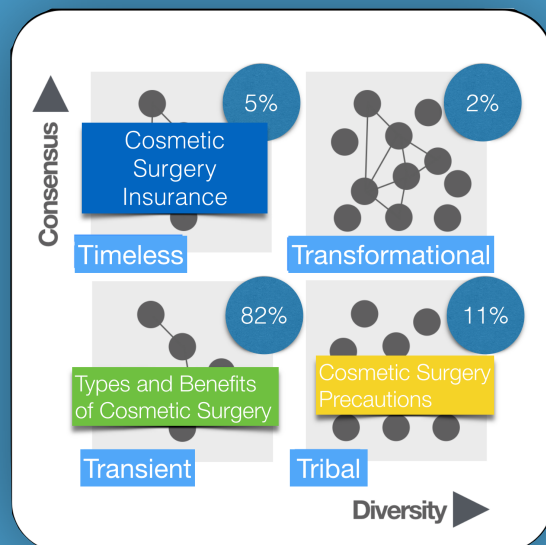
Strategies based on such a world-view are useful to attract client budget, and may well succeed. But most fail. Or at least, for many, the light of the call-to-action flickers and fades, once the fuel of campaign spend is depleted or exhausted.

In truth, the world is already rich with engagement 'in the wild'.

For a given client brief, there is, almost certainly, high-value, authentic, pre-existing engagement adjacent to the brief's concerns, the brand's proposition, or the product's benefit.

If budget is deployed to find, then quantify and qualify that pre-existing engagement, and then build strategy and tactics that *engage* with that engagement, then the campaign will benefit both from authenticity, and from an inexhaustible external source of energy and power, with which to fuel its success.

Discovery of Opportunity



Cosmetic Surgery Precautions

Engagement is long term and driven by active debate and shared individual experience.

Unmet need.

Cosmetic Surgery Insurance

Engagement is long term, consensual and driven by third parties.

Brands contribute little to this key narrative.

Unmet need.

Types and Benefits of Cosmetic Surgery

Transient narrative. Fast-flow, low-value.

Quantification and qualification of Engagement related to Cosmetic Surgery in Japan. Market-led high engagement is with education about, and reduction of, risk—both needs are currently unmet by brand positioning or communications, and therefore, represent opportunities.

3.

Contextualise Social

A place for social, and social in its place

Social media is as a fast-flowing river. The fast-flow is high-energy and challenging to harness in the service of strategic will.

Engagement in the river of social may have a great positive impact, may unexpectedly twist a brand or business message into the shape of abject failure, or may simply be swept away, in the wake of more interesting messaging or fast-unfolding events.

Fast-flow media satisfies only some human needs, in some contexts.

Rather than offering a panacea for all communication, for many consumers, 'social' constitutes simply a regular update on an already formed world-view, itself informed by the perceived authority of other sources.

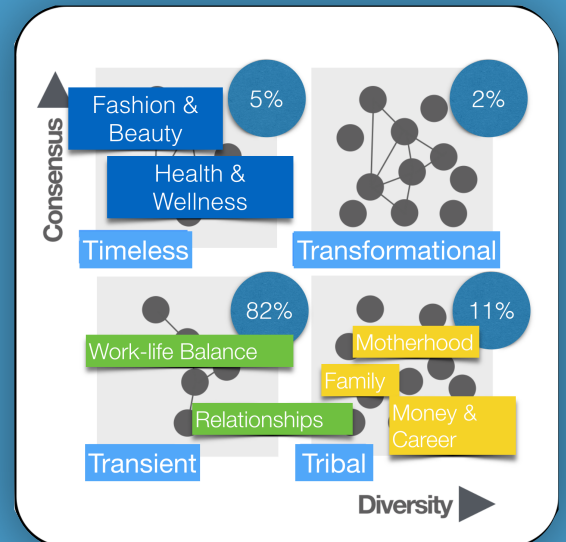
For others, 'social' may be the channel through which individual experience is shared, winnowed and assimilated by a community.

For yet others, it is light entertainment.

For any strategy to engage successfully with fast-flow social media, it is essential to understand the *context* within which such media are relevant to the narratives at hand, and to those who engage with those narratives.

This is possible by the characterisation of engagement with the narrative, and of the role of fast-flow within that engagement.

Social's Role in Engagement



Here, engagement analysis of narratives which relate to women and lifestyle.

From the categorisation of the narratives, we can see that engagement around Health and Wellness and Fashion and Beauty are led by authorities—columnists and medial professionals for the former, and fashion editors/trendsetters for the latter.

For Motherhood and Career narratives, however, engagement is driven by the flow of shared personal experience. Here, fast-flow social media is a powerful channel.

4.

Embrace Gatekeepers They are few, and significant

Hubs, 'thought-leaders', 'key players', memes. To get a message across to a key, wider audience, some small set of journalists, critics, advocates, community leaders or concepts are the necessary—and often *sufficient*—targets of concentrated engagement.

Intuition and mathematical theory alike, suggest that effort expended carefully on such small groups, will be better spent than on broadcast to the audience en-masse. The members of such groups are the gatekeepers, the key-holders, the way through.

There is, in any domain, rarely a large number of such key players. Domain experts can probably name the "top 10" key gatekeepers in their field. Likewise, a good PR knows which five journalists to lunch to get the right message above the fold in tomorrow's first edition.

A challenge in the 'new world' is that the 'steady state' of media, actors and ideas, is increasingly buffeted by the transformative Communication Power of network-energised *emergent* actors, trends, collective opinion and action.

In the light of such contingencies, 'business as usual' via the same channels, with the same messages, is inadequate to the challenge.

To act effectively, the little black book of yesteryear must be replaced by new methods, which identify and characterise emergent key voices and concepts in near-real-time.

The knee-jerk response of 'Twitter is afire against us, we must respond in kind' is most likely counter-productive. The human social truth remains—the number of gatekeepers with whom to engage will be small. But who are they?

Volumetric 'social listening' won't provide the answer. It is here crucial to have on hand, methods that cut through the fog of buzz, and identify, structurally, who holds the key to communications power.

Where There Is Engagement, There Will Be Significant Voices

<http://www.melbourne.foe.org.au>
<http://quitcoal.org.au>
<http://www.theaustralian.com.au>
<http://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au>
<http://www.heraldsun.com.au>
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/No-CSG-in-Victoria/278427315523831>
<http://www.theage.com.au>
<http://www.smh.com.au>
<http://bccwords.blogspot.com>
<http://yes2renewables.org>
<http://environmentvictoria.org.au>
<http://www.edovic.org.au>
<http://www.deakin.edu.au>
<http://theconversation.com>
<http://coalseamgasnews.org>

<http://www.awhiffoflemongrass.com>
<http://eatdrinkkl.blogspot.com>
<http://wordspics.com>
<http://kampungboycitygal.com>
<http://masak-masak.blogspot.com>
<http://goodyfoodies.blogspot.com>
<http://fatboyrecipes.blogspot.com>
<http://theyumlist.blogspot.com>
<http://epicurious.wordpress.com>
<http://thedailygrind.com.my>
<http://www.lotsofcravings.com>
<http://www.thedailygrind.com.my>
<http://j2kfm.blogspot.com>
<http://www.vkeong.com>
<http://www.tummy-rumble.com>
<http://alyfood.wordpress.com>
<https://www.facebook.com/KGBBangsar>
<http://katelifefood.blogspot.com>
<http://www.hungrygowhere.my>
<http://bangsar-babe.blogspot.com>
<https://www.facebook.com/TheDailyGrindBangsar>
<http://www.foodspotting.com>
<http://ccfoodtravel.com>

5. Weave A Helix Engagement favours coalition

Communication problem-solvers, given a complex brief, may attempt to solve 'the problem', as a whole.

A careful analysis of engagement 'in the wild' often reveals that there is already a helix of engagement in play, with interlocking threads contributed by differing categories of actor.

in our experience, many complex narratives are woven on a framework of authority and expertise. In such narratives, every category of actor contributes a different flavour of that authority, which enriches and strengthens the narrative as a whole. None could be easily removed or replaced without weakening the whole.

Likewise, it is difficult, costly and failure-prone, to attempt to enter the narrative uninvited, as an outside actor—an uphill battle hard to win.

Often there are three such categories of player—a 'triple helix' of engagement.

An exemplar of such would be the global environmental narrative of Climate Change—a timeless narrative woven from commercial, academic and governmental/NGO threads.

To inform successful communications activity, one must analyse the nature of the narrative as it stands, to identify which thread (or threads) represent opportunities to 'engage with engagement' (see above).

Conversely, if the desire is to craft afresh a timeless narrative around a specific concern, there is value in the analysis of analogous narratives 'in the wild'—to highlight structures which can be replicated, leveraged or exploited, which may then be applied to create a self-sustaining, strong basis for growth, stability and engagement.

Climate Change Triple Helix



Topical drivers of engagement for the global Climate Change narrative reflect the significance of the Triple Helix of Academia, Government and Commerce.

6. Be Global. Live Local

Experience drives engagement

Engagement arises from many factors.

Amongst the most powerful, are the voices of respected authority, and of individual human experience. The first, often, is the collective, democratic, voice of history, consensus, consideration. The second, is situated: a place, a time, an event.

Often, engagement at a global level, with the narrative of 'the big issue', is with the bedrock of authority: a common, shared story.

For any *individual* situated experience to become sensible, context is key.

If context is not understood to those sharing experience, their sharing is often a reaching-out to their community or peers: 'help me understand what's happening here'.

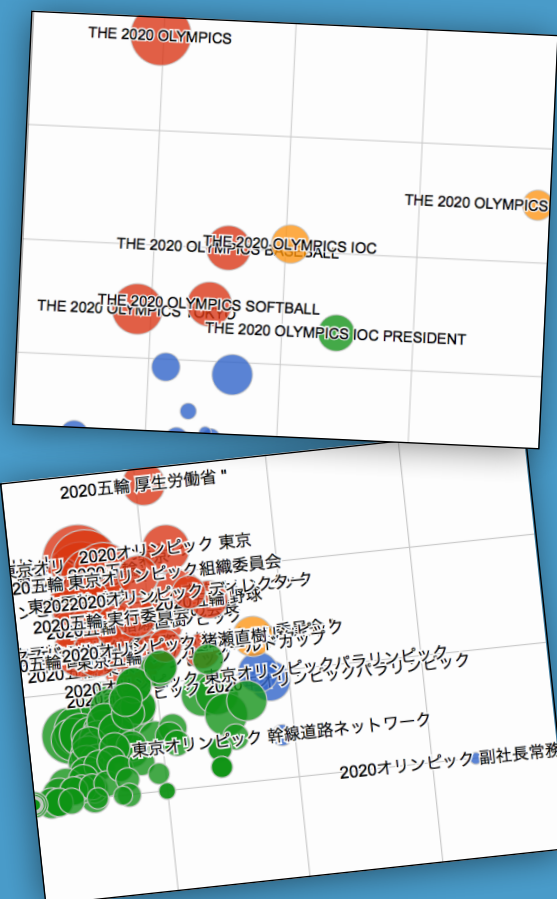
Local engagement driven by such needs for shared consensual meaning, is often intensely charged, but may relate only peripherally to the global 'big picture' narrative.

Often, evidence indicates that a global strategy is best enacted through consideration of the 'local' context, and its particular, situated engagements.

To 'engage with engagement' in a specific time and place, one must have the capability to identify and characterise the nature of this, often intense, local engagement.

'Local', as used here, does not relate exclusively to spatial proximity. 'Locality' can refer to psychographic or demographic dimensions, as meaningfully as to geography.

Local Experience, Local Engagement



Differing nature of engagement at global and local scales, with regards to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Global Engagement (top) is with the IOC, the Games themselves, and the sports included in the Games.

Local engagement (bottom) is spurred by political, regional and infrastructural concerns: themes closer to home.

7. Stay Human Don't let the machines have the last word

Sometimes it seems we've lost control.

In 2006, Philosopher of Mind, Daniel Dennett wrote:

[It] used to be true that the differential replication of such classic memes as songs, poems and recipes depended on their winning the competition for residence in human brains, but now that a multitude of search engines on the Web have interposed themselves between authors and their (human) audiences, competing with one another for reputation as high-quality sources of cultural items, significant fitness differences between memes can accumulate independently of any human appreciation or cognizance at all.

The day may soon come when a cleverly turned phrase in a book gets indexed by many search engines, and thereupon enters the language as a new cliché, without anybody human having read the book¹.

Are we there yet? From old-school SEO, SEM, and programmatic media, through to the new-fashioned journalistic trolling practised by the *Daily Mail* and *HuffPo*—all attempt to exploit machine-mediated consumption, to direct our engagement for the achievement of overtly commercial ends.

So, is the Internet over? Is everything we see and to which we respond, a commercial contrivance?

The good news is, it isn't. There are measures of engagement which operate *orthogonally* to search: SEO, SEM doesn't contaminate patterns of authentic human engagement, which these methods apply.

The rise of the machines may be upon us, but the *human* Internet, is alive and well. You just need to know how to find it.

1. *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. Daniel Dennett. Allen Lane, 2006.

Search vs Fan Engagement



Football: high engagement, high commercial value. Google's results for Liverpool FC (top) rank-up authority and SEO. Our engagement metric, highlights authentic engagement from the club and sport's devoted communities: forums, blogs, fansites, video...

Looking Forward

There are elements of our method which are novel and worthy of note:

- The strongly empirical approach we have taken: these findings are *discoveries*, made independently of a preconceived theoretical framework.
- The sheer volume of narratives we can find, sort and understand: this is comparable to many, many lifetimes of individual human experience. We receive constant feedback and validation from real-world practitioners—subject matter experts from the private, public and NGO sectors.

As methods such as ours become more affordable and democratic, we can expect a fundamental re-structuring of power across many sectors.

Networked media already destabilise the status-quo of power. Tools such as our Narrative Engine, automate the application of such media to achieve Communication Power.

Such tools, in the hands of the grassroots—rather than being only available to the communication specialist elite—will deliver a new paradigm-shift in communications.

About the Authors

Significance Systems, a science-led company, delivers Communication Power to global leaders in business, marketing and PR.

Its unique platform, Narrative Engine, identifies deep narratives and their key drivers, for any topic, in any language, across the Internet. This data delivers a step-change in value, over subject-matter experts, social listening, behavioural research, or 'Big Data' projects.

Significance Systems' founders, Dr John Ricketts and Darrell Berry, first met in Tokyo in the 1990s.

Forbes magazine credits them as being amongst the earliest pioneers of Social Media.

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