

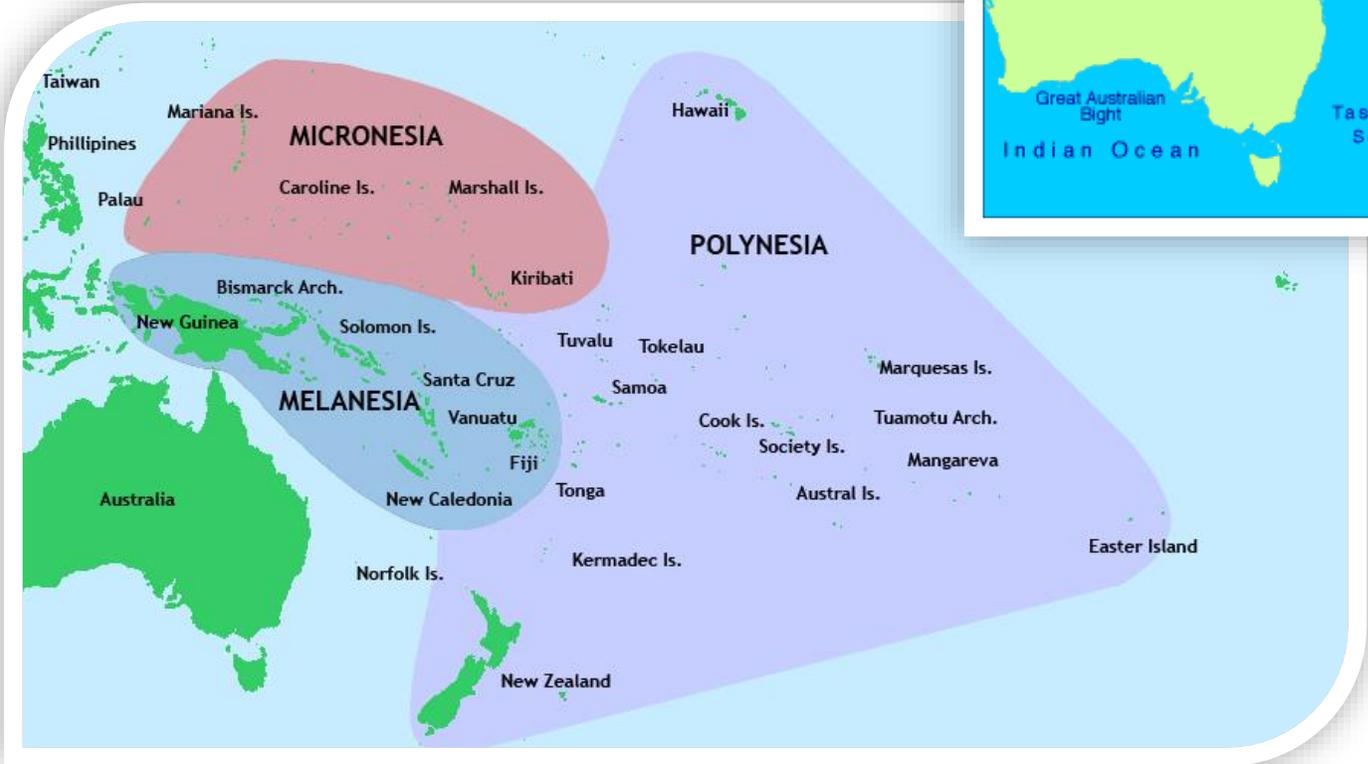
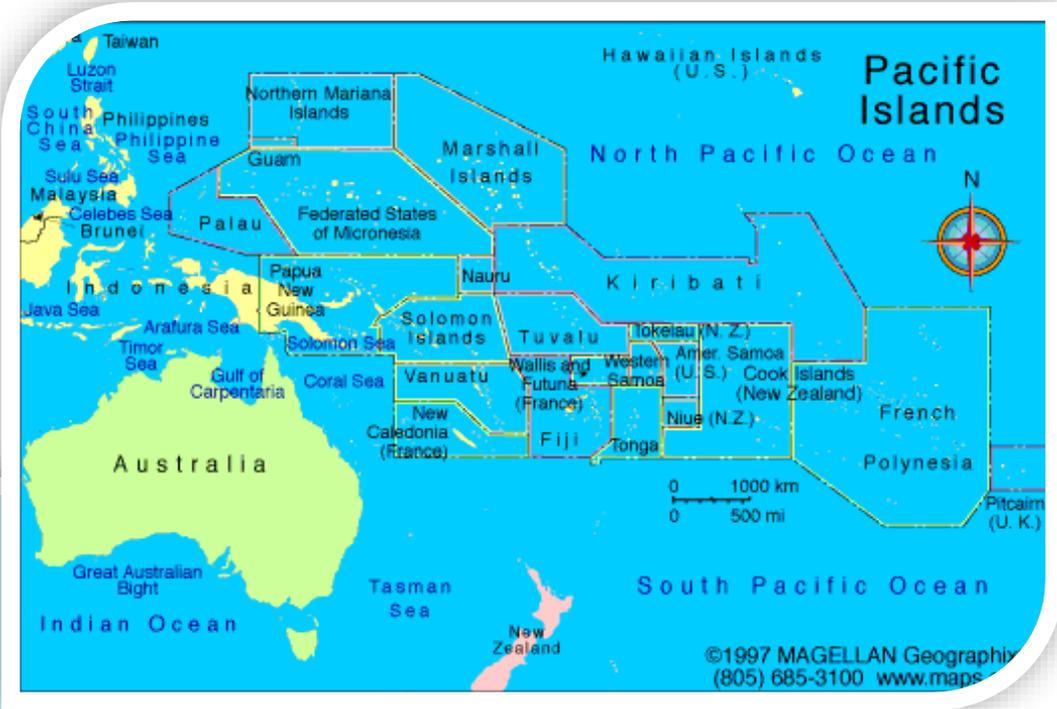
Old and New Media in the Pacific Islands: synergies, challenges and potential

Panel: Mediated Communication, Public Opinion & Society
Section

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Vast geographical distances challenging for maintaining communication infrastructures



The Pacific Communication Context

- The Pacific Islands region contains very diverse geographic, socio-cultural, political and communication ecologies
- Each country has its own unique challenges and opportunities related to communication flows, systems and practices
- With growing social media presence in the region, Facebook and, to some degree, Twitter have become sources of information for journalists during natural disasters
- Recent studies though have indicated that ICTs are becoming more relevant, and indeed are underutilised for development despite presenting significant potential

Four case studies from the Pacific

- Cook Islands
- Tonga
- Fiji
- Papua New Guinea

Political participation and Pacific diasporic online media

- The ICT revolution in the Pacific has led to a growth of online sites dedicated to political issues “where citizens engage in the political process” Finau, Prasad, Kant, Tarai, Logan and Cox (2014)
- During the 2014 elections in Tonga, the Cook Islands and Fiji all campaigns featured a strong online political presence.
- Elements in the elections were the role of the internet in reaching diasporic groups, in moderating family influence on voting behaviour and a clear understanding by politicians and campaign strategists of the importance of the internet to younger voters.

Papua New Guinea: information & news consumption in the age of new media

- The biggest Pacific Island both in terms of geography and population (over 7 million).
- Low adult literacy rates & the linguistic challenges - with over 800 distinct languages
- A thriving media industry with an online presence through their own websites and social media profiles.
- However, the impact of their engagement with social media is yet to be seen

PNG: Developing a news media culture



- The entrance of new online media in the PNG news scene has added elements of time currency & citizen journalism as the *LoopPNG* & *Mi Ripot* cases indicate.
- *LoopPNG*, the newest online news service owned by the Irish telecommunications company Digicel, relies on stringers in the provinces to provide stories and has regular updates on news as they happen
- For those who have access to internet, *LoopPNG* provides the ideal news service – short stories that are regularly updated, and an opportunity to check for a breaking news story.
- With the improving connectivity throughout PNG provided by Digicel, *LoopPNG* is relatively easily accessible, as long as people can afford the smart phones and the cost of accessing Internet .



- EMTV, PNG's oldest television station operates an online news service *Mi Ripot* (I'm Reporting in Melanesian Pidgin) that depends on citizen journalists for stories.
- It is separate from the daily news stories produced by the EMTV's reporters which are also accessible online on EMTV website.
- TV audience is encouraged to send in a story about anything that is happening in their area. *Mi Ripot* will feature selected stories online and also telecast in the *Mi Ripot* program.
- Its site indicates citizen journalists are paid K20 (US\$8) for stories without images, K30(US\$12) for stories with images, and K100 (US\$40) for the best *Mi Ripot* story of the month.
- EMTV had engaged a media trainer who has travelled around the country providing basic training on how to identify, gather and write stories to interested people.

Conclusions

- Social media & online news media have had an affect on the **democratic process** in the Pacific in recent years.
- Those affects have been different for each country because of different social, political & cultural elements.
- In some cases the new media have had quite opposite effects
 - i.e. among the diasporic Tongan community they have been used to apply family pressure on voters from outside the kingdom.
 - Like the technology itself, political processes in the Pacific islands are being adapted to new circumstances.
 - Eventually each island nation will reflect its own distinct blend of technology, politics and culture.
- PNG: The potential of new media in terms of increasing information accessibility & dissemination goes hand in hand with increasing **digital media literacy**. In a country that has still persisting high illiteracy levels, this becomes a double impediment.