

Addressing the roadblocks of constitutional change through mobilising Indigenous Voices online

Bronwyn Fredericks and Abraham Bradfield

Abstract

Indigenous Australians are increasingly turning to social media as a form of political activism. While “white” voices and colonial power structures dominate public, political, and media discourses, social media provides a space where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can amplify their voices and the issues most pertinent to them. In this article, we discuss how social media and online forums are being used to advocate and build public awareness of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. We consider how social media counters colonial harm by providing a platform upon which conjecture and misinformation about what constitutional reform means can be called out, challenged, and contested by additional sources of information. Using hashtags, webinars and other forms of online campaigning, supporters of constitutional recognition are building networks that prioritises and centres Indigenous perspectives, in effect practicing the very representation that they are calling for in Australia’s parliament through the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Introduction

The Uluru Statement from the Heart offers an opportunity to enter a new phase of relationships between settler and Indigenous peoples and communities in Australia. A poignant and poetic declaration that arose of the deliberations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates from communities throughout the country, the statement calls for constitutional reform that would recognise Indigenous peoples while providing the legal protection needed to ensure that

they have an adequate voice and representation across all levels of government (National Constitutional Convention, 2017). Failing to enshrine a First Nations Voice within Australia's constitution means that the colonial harm which maintains the structures that prioritise western authority by oppressing and silencing Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being will be maintained (Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Smith, 2013).

Constitutional reform however is notoriously difficult to achieve, with only eight of the past forty-four referendums passing. Anne Twomey, Professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Sydney, notes that many lawmakers of the 19th Century designed the constitution so that reforms were “as difficult as possible” (Twomey, 2019). This was done so that the authority of state governments could be maintained and that the constitution could not be easily amended at the mere “fluctuation” of public opinion. Although challenging, reforms are by no means unachievable. Cobble Cobble woman Megan Davis – who is a law expert, co-author of the Uluru Statement, and member of the Referendum Council appointed to advise government on the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australian's constitution – connoted that the constitution does provide the mechanisms for change, should the majority of Australians want it (Davis, 2018a).

In this article, we discuss the significance of the Uluru Statement and its accompanying campaign for calls for a referendum and “constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country enact constitutional reform” (National Constitutional Convention, 2017). We specifically focus on how Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are using social media as means to generate greater public awareness and support. Online activism and campaigning have provided opportunities to combat misinformation and speak back to those who seek to derail the process and alter the outcome.

Public discourses silence Indigenous peoples too often (Langton, 2011; Moreton-Robinson, 2009; Rolls, 2011), and have done so throughout the colonising regime that has sought to render colonial harm and epistemic violence through disregarding, dismissing and dehumanising First Nations knowledges and outlooks (Fredericks, 2009; Moreton-Robinson, 2011; Rigney, 2001). Ethnic diversity, in all levels of government, does not reflect the demographics of the wider Australian public. Indigenous peoples are not promoted to higher executive and decision-making positions within private industry and the public service and private industry (Bargallie, 2020) or within universities (Fredericks & White, 2018; Fredericks, et al, 2019). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to be spoken to and spoken for – remaining a population to “consult” rather than “lead”. Media has been described as “whitewashed” (Vatsikopoulos, 2015), void of ethnic diversity and lacking in Indigenous perspectives and stories that not only cover issues directly relating to Indigenous affairs, but all areas of national and global interest (Thomas, Jakubowicz, & Norman, 2019). When the media does portray Indigenous peoples they are commonly done so through a “deficit lens” that focuses on negative outcomes, rather than the immense achievements, success stories and contributions they make (Fogarty et al, 2018a; Fogarty, et al., 2018b). Indigenous peoples are often represented through biased and stereotypical narratives that shapes the ways in which they become “known” and objectified within mainstream public consciousness (Said, 1979; McQuire, 2020; Thomas et al., 2019).

Hegemonic discourses privilege what Darumbal and South Sea Islander journalist Amy McQuire calls the “White Witness” (2019) – that is the authoritative expert whose knowledge is legitimised at the expense and denial of Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being. Collectively, the mechanisms that seek to silence Indigenous peoples maintain the very regimes of power that reinforce colonial harm and white supremacy (Carlson et al., 2018). We therefore discuss how online forums and social media are being used to prioritise Indigenous voices,

counter misinformation, and campaign for the structural changes needed to enshrine and protect Indigenous outlooks across all levels of decision-making.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was the culmination of 13 regional dialogues and community consultations conducted between December 2016 and May 2017. The Australian government, led at the time by then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull had appointed the 16-member Referendum Council in 2015. The council was made up of Indigenous representatives, including lawyer Professor Megan Davis and chair of the Lowitja Institute Pat Anderson who were to lead “the process for national consultations and community engagement about constitutional recognition, including a concurrent series of Indigenous designed and led consultation” and report it back to government (Referendum Council, 2017: 3). Their role was to document what constitutional reform meant to Indigenous peoples and communities.

Upon completing the dialogues and receiving over 1,111 submissions by 2017, 250 delegates from each region met on the lands of the Anangu people in Uluru, Northern Territory, to attend the First Nations National Constitutional Convention (Appleby & Davis, 2018; Davis & Williams, 2021; Larkin & Galloway, 2018). Here, they discussed the finding of the dialogues and proposed, debated, negotiated, and devised a path forward that would ensure that Indigenous peoples’ interests were not only included, but the driving force behind constitutional reform. The Uluru Statement from the Heart was the culmination of this work (Davis, 2019b) and is an invitation “to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future” (National Constitutional Convention, 2017).

The delegates devised a model based on three outcomes. Firstly, to create a constitutionally enshrined Indigenous Voice to Parliament that would represent Indigenous communities in

ways that are free of partisan political interests and party affiliations. This would secure Indigenous peoples' involvement in political decisions concerning their interests and rights. Secondly, that Indigenous communities and the government may enter a process of mutual agreement making so that they may begin to negotiate and co-design a Treaty between the two parties. Thirdly, to establish a "Makarrata Commission" to supervise agreement making and truth telling between all levels of government and Indigenous peoples. Makarrata is a Yolngu word that translates to "come together after a struggle" (Gaykamangu, 2012; Pearson, 2017). The order of these three steps is essential, as a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament would ensure that Indigenous representation is protected, lasting, and flows through all levels of decision and policymaking (Davis, 2018b).

The referendum council presented the Uluru Statement from the Heart to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in good faith and with the understanding that parliament would debate its recommendations with steps towards enshrining them within Australia's constitution. Turnbull however rejected what he saw as "radical" reforms in favour of minimalistic symbolic recognition of Indigenous peoples. He felt that constitutional change as proposed by the Statement was "too ambitious" (Viellaris, 2017) and held little hope of being passed in a referendum. In doing so, Turnbull denied wider debate of the importance and benefits of Voice, Treaty, and Truth.

Many Indigenous peoples turned to social media to express their frustration and outrage, highlighting that this was yet another example of colonial harm and structural racism. Lawyer, Dylan Lindo poignantly described Turnbull's decision as an act of "mean-spirited bastardry" on Twitter (Wahlquist, 2017b). Social media has repeatedly proven an effective means of advocacy through decolonising methodologies, calling out misinformation and highlighting government inaction (Sweet et al. 2013; Geia & Sweet 2015; Geia et al., 2017; Carlson 2019).

The opposition leader at the time, Bill Shorten, similarly used social media to call out the government's response as one of "disrespect" (Davidson, 2017).

Anderson, Davis, and Pearson (2017) explain that what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people put forward is the only form of recognition worth pursuing. They argue that recognition of Indigenous peoples cannot take place without enshrining an Indigenous led mechanism within parliamentary processes, for the "Voice is recognition". Throughout the inquiry process there was "broad support for the concept of a First Nations Voice, both as a form of recognition and particularly as a mechanism to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have a greater say in the policy and legislation that governs their affairs" (Anderson et al., 2017). It is without doubt that the gathering at Uluru marked a potential turning point in broader agreement and support to work towards constitutional and governance change as well as broader reform. This is noted in the *Final Report of the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (Gainsford, 2018).

Since the convention, processes and options once rejected by Indigenous peoples such as symbolic recognition within the Constitution's preamble, appear to be re-surfacing in government dialogues; emerging as the minimalist reform we have seen proposed in recent times (Gooley, 2021; Harris, 2021). This is not what was agreed upon at Uluru, nor does it reflect what is documented in the Referendum Council's Final Report (2017) or the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee (Gainsford, 2018). Prime Minister Turnbull and subsequent Prime Minister Scott Morrison's minimalist approach goes against the processes the government originally endorsed. Noel Pearson stated that to reject an enshrined Indigenous Voice to parliament in favour of symbolic recognition "would be contradictory to his government's election commitment to Co-design the voice" (Chrysanthos, 2019).

On many occasions, politicians have used media platforms to distort public understandings of how a Voice to Parliament may look (Fredericks & Bradfield, 2021b). This was often premature, presumptuous, and based on conjecture and mistruths. Nationals MP Barnaby Joyce for example was an outspoken critic of a constitutionally enshrined Voice, basing his objection on the misguided notion that the Australian public would not support radical changes to the parliamentary structures and the establishment of a “third chamber” (Yaxley & Conifer, 2017). The myth over the Voice functioning as a third chamber extended to the highest levels of government with Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, reiterating, despite what legal professionals and constitutional experts were saying, that the Voice ultimately operated as an additional legislative chamber (Karp, 2018).

Such statements are unfounded as the proposed Voice – as presented by the Uluru Statement – would operate as a non-binding tribunal with no legislative or veto powers (Rubenstein, 2018). Prominent Indigenous figures such as lawyer, Gabrielle Appleby pointed out that the “idea [of a new Chamber] is not what was being discussed at the dialogues in the lead-up to Uluru and that wasn’t what was being discussed in the working groups” (Wahlquist, 2017a). Social media played a significant role in exposing and correcting these distractions, as it has in other fields and across numerous other social movements (Thomas et al., 2019; Duarte et al., 2017; Fredericks et al., 2021; Geia et al., 2013).

Matthew Rimmer (@DrRimmer, 2019), Professor of IP and Innovation Law at QUT, used social media to call out the Liberal Minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton, who like Joyce persistently misrepresented the Voice’s purpose and function (Remeikis, 2019b). MP Linda Burney (@LindaBurneyMP, 2018), who is of Wiradjuri and Scottish descent, tweeted that it was a deceitful and dangerous act of “scaremongering” that had the potential of undoing bipartisan support for reconciliation. Exposed and called to account, Joyce was eventually

forced to apologise (Remeikis, 2019a) but no such apology has come from Morrison or other MPs who continue to spread false information.

The Uluru Statement signifies the coming of a new era in Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations where Indigenous children may “walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country”, opening opportunities for “fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia” where different peoples can come together in meaningful and mutually beneficial ways (National Constitutional Convention, 2017). The statement is the first instance of a government proactively seeking Indigenous perspectives and insights to inform its responses to constitutional reform. Yet, the aftermath of the National Constitutional Convention despairingly falls into all too familiar patterns of white colonial disregard of Indigenous peoples when faced with the prospect of confronting and reforming the very policies and systems that maintain its own dominance and power.

Megan Davis explains the necessity of gaining public support as means of building political pressure and holding politicians to account. Her activism has adopted the approach of changing the system from within, that is, using the mechanisms available to lobby for constitutional change. Davis (2019a) writes,

We do not have the luxury of walking away and giving up on structural reform. We have garnered enormous support, including from inside politics – just not enough support, yet. The logic of the reform, for the nation’s future, is irrepressible. Substantive, concrete reform is the only thing the nation has not tried. Reconciliation action plans won’t do it, a symbolic statement of recognition won’t do it, the Closing the Gap report demonstrably cannot do it, a legislated ‘voice’ won’t achieve it, state-based treaties can’t do it, the Productivity Commission can’t do it. The conventional parliamentary system and its ancillary mechanisms have failed us. Yet we

require that very system to endorse this change. We have no choice but to adopt strategies that engage the public.

Social media has been vital in generating public awareness, interest, and engagement. The Uluru Statement from the Heart has always been a community-driven reform, described as a “gift” to the Australian people (McInerney, 2020). The Statement itself reads that the reforms offer an opportunity for Indigenous children to “walk in two worlds” with their cultures being “a gift to their country” (National Constitutional Convention, 2017). The Final Report of the Referendum Council (2017) similarly cites the words of Yolngu elder Galarrwuy Yunupingu (2016: 28) who describes Indigenous identities as a gift to the nation, awaiting acceptance in a meaningful way. It is natural therefore that the movement utilise social media as means of generating greater exposure and awareness while empowering people with the resources needed to place pressure on the “parliamentary system and its ancillary mechanisms” (Davis, 2019a). One way this has been achieved is through directing supporters – across numerous platforms – to write letters or make submissions to Government forums such as the *Indigenous Voice Discussion Paper* (Australian Government, 2021), declaring their support and demand for action (Fredericks, 2021).

Building and maintaining public interest through social media

Reflecting colonial narratives of so-called “primitiveness”, hegemonic discourses often present Indigenous peoples as being anti-technological or lacking the knowledge or interest in digital and/or social media (Callinan, 2014). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ uptake of social media however is increasing at a faster rate than non-Indigenous peoples, with approximately 60% of those in remote locations using it as opposed to 42% of non-Indigenous Australians (Callinan, 2014; Carlson, 2013). Indigenous people use social media for a variety

of reasons but have overwhelmingly done so to maintain social networks and affirm their identities and cultures (Carlson & Frazer, 2018). It is also a form of resistance with one survey showing that 79% of Indigenous respondents are politically active when online (Carlson, 2018). Social media provides a mechanism for activism through amplifying Indigenous voices and empowering peoples in ways that direct conversations towards the topics they see as most pressing (Geia & Sweet 2015; Wilson et al., 2017; Carlson et al., 2018). It has therefore played an integral role in building awareness and momentum around the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Social media can also provide insights into community sentiment and attitudes that challenge dominant presentations. In 2015, an independent online survey conducted by @IndigenousX sought to gauge public opinion of symbolic recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia's constitution (Liddle, 2015; Latimore, 2018; Maddison, 2016). The survey was in response to the Recognise campaign and its goal "to bring conversations about constitutional reform and recognition into the mainstream", preparing for a future referendum (Reconciliation Australia, 2018). While a media release from Recognise suggested that most Indigenous people supported constitutional recognition, the survey by IndigenousX signalled an overwhelming apprehension towards whose voices were being represented and how such "recognition" would look within the constitution (Liddle, 2015).

The IndigenousX survey found that 75% of respondents rejected symbolic constitutional reform and 54% supported an Indigenous representative body. The 13 regional dialogues conducted in 2016/17 by the Referendum Council mirrored these findings with unanimous calls for a Voice to Parliament being expressed in all regions. These views culminated in the Uluru Statement of the Heart with its call for a constitutionally enshrined Voice and rejection of

symbolic piecemeal recognition (Dreher, McCallum, & Waller, 2016; Fredericks & Bradfield, 2020, 2021a).

Subsequent surveys have shown overwhelming public support for constitutional reform. The Centre for Governance and Public Policy (2017) documented that 71% of respondents supported constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples. It was felt that such recognition should be more substantial than a symbolic acknowledgement within the preamble, but rather should translate into a meaningful “representative Indigenous body established to advise the Parliament on laws and policies affecting Indigenous people” (Centre for Governance and Public Policy, 2017: 3). These findings are consistent with other surveys conducted around that time (Ford & Blumer, 2016; Zillman, 2017). Support for constitutional reform continues to grow, increasing from 77% in 2018 to 86% in 2020 (Reconciliation Australia, 2020). Evaluation of public submissions lodged as part of the government’s co-design process indicates that more than 50% of respondents want a constitutionally enshrined Indigenous Voice (Appleby et al., 2021). While these figures specifically relate to constitutional recognition, an overwhelming 94% of the public feel that it is important that Indigenous peoples have a say over the matters that affect them.

Despite this, Prime Minister Scott Morrison continues to claim that a constitutionally enshrined Indigenous Voice to Parliament does not have the public’s support and is not part the Government’s agenda (Harris, 2021). Members of his own party, inclusive of the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Wongi and Noongar man Ken Wyatt, have contradicted this statement by promising and budgeting for a referendum before eventually backtracking (Knowles, 2021). Political rhetoric is now shifting back towards a symbolic advisory body that would provide an Indigenous Voice to *Government* (Fredericks & Bradfield, 2021a, 2021c). Like Indigenous representative bodies before it, such as ATSIC, an Indigenous voice to government lacks the

security of constitutional enshrinement, meaning its existence is subject to the resourcing, financing, and will of the government (Doran, 2020).

While COVID-19 could have side-tracked and derailed public interest in the Uluru campaign, it has nonetheless provided additional opportunities to hold online forums and discussions. Due to restrictions on movement and the number of people who could be physically present in a room during the pandemic, many conferences and events moved online. Although this presented numerous challenges, requiring new skills and online literacy, it also offered opportunities to create wider networks and generate greater dialogue amongst those who may not have traditionally met one another. Dawson and McCalman (2020) write that:

One of the good things to emerge from Australia's pandemic has been the explosion of discussion, webinars and talks as we Zoom across institutional, geographic and cultural borders. This national conversation must grow...What matters is that we learn from each other, find some common ground, and focus on the reconstruction.

The uptake of online forums was particularly evident during the 2020 Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC festival, which resulted in numerous events ranging from formal discussions and webinars, music and art performances, and other social events such as trivia nights. In the lead to NAIDOC week, the UNSW Indigenous Law Centre alongside Nura Gili the Centre for Indigenous Programs, held a series of three webinars on Voice, Treaty, and Truth (UNSW Sydney, 2020). The first discussion featured prominent Indigenous representatives such as Professor Megan Davis, Noel Pearson, Dr Dani Larkin, and Dr Pat Anderson. It attracted more than 1000 attendees who ranged from members of the public, former politicians, human rights lawyers, activists, academics, and many more (McInerney, 2020).

Social media is predicated on building networks and connections where people may exchange ideas, challenge outlooks, and create a sense of solidarity through shared experiences and building a sense of community. Warrimaay scholar Grieve-Williams (2020: 34) writes of social media's potential to unite people in ways that challenge larger systemic structures of racism:

The diversity of our campaigns, and the media activism that accompanies them, now need once again to develop to another level of organization. It is time for one united front and a concentrated campaign in order to break through the hegemony of settler colonial racism and restore sovereignty.

Social media and initiatives provide a platform where groups and organisations can be supplied with information that may translate into real sustained action. The *UluruStatement.org* website, for example, not only encourages members of the public to sign the online canvas – as a symbolic declaration of their support – but also provides directions, suggestions, and templates for translating their own statements into official written submissions to the government as part of the co-design process (Fredericks & Bradfield, 2021c).

Voices are also connected through hashtags that span across numerous platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. This has enabled Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices to interconnect and speak to one another in different ways, potentially reaching new audiences. Hashtags such as #UluruStatement and #VoiceTreatyTruth integrate diverse stories and conversations, maintaining a unified front for a common cause. Understanding the reach and influence of social media, Yorta Yorta scholar Summer Finlay has created a social media “tool kit” for Reconciliation NSW which provides the basic skills necessary to build awareness and create a sense of organisation and uniformity (Reconciliation NSW, 2021). Branding with heart

emojicons have also proven particularly useful in creating solidarity and excitement around the campaign.

Indigenous ways of knowing and doing have historically been passed from generation to generation orally, and through various means of communication such as song, story, and body painting. While this does not preclude Indigenous peoples from participating in Western legal and knowledge structures (they have no option but to do so), it is important to acknowledge that the Statement from the Heart was the product of *dialogues* and *conversations* led by Indigenous peoples. Dialogue was conducted in ways that reflected Indigenous cultural protocols and conventions (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). Social media and other forms of expression provides users with tools that may represent and communicate messages in culturally meaningful ways. The final track of rock band Midnight Oil's 2020 album, *The Makarrata Project*, for example, features a reading of the Statement in its entirety that is read by Pat Anderson, Stan Grant, Adam Goodes, Ursula Yovich and Troy Cassar-Daley. The spoken word reminds listeners that its message is something lived and embodied, transcending the written page. It is a call to action.

The Statement follows the traditions of the Barunga Statement (1988) and the Yirrkala bark petition (1963) which integrate Indigenous knowledges by surrounding the statement with the traditional designs of its local custodians. The designs of the Uluru Statement belong to the Anangu people and are painted by local Multijulu artists. The document itself is a manifestation of two-way knowledge where different traditions come together in ways that signified unity. Aunty Rene Kuliti, who is a traditional owner of Uluru, explains that "Tjukurrpa [Dreaming] came from north, west, south, east, and teaching all the families so they know. Uluru is that shared place where all of those stories meet" (From the Heart, 2020).

Many Indigenous peoples have used social media as a means of reclaiming space and creating “Blak visibility” within domains that are traditionally dominated by white faces and voices (Gregory, 2021). As Indigenous peoples’ uptake of social media has increased, so have their followers and the sites dedicated to amplifying their voices. In 2021, Wiradjuri author Anita Heiss (@AnitaHeiss) had 33,400 followers, lawyer and academic Megan Davis (@mdavisqlder) had 22,400, and the Twitter account belonging to @IndigenousX had 65,200 followers. While individuals have used social media to highlight and respond to various topics (such as the Uluru Statement) the ability to network conversations through reposts, hashtags, and links amplifies a collective Indigenous voice that creates a safe support-network, whilst also reflecting a diversity of opinion. This is observed by author Anita Heiss who writes how “social media has become a platform for many to share resources, recommendations and content for broader audiences” (Heiss, 2020). Initiatives such as #ShareTheMicNow, where different Black women host the accounts of prominent white women with large online followings, or Twitter “takeovers”, have also proven successful in amplifying Indigenous voices and creating “Blak visibility” (Gregory, 2021).

Indigenous accounts such as @IndigenousX have adopted a grassroots approach to extending networks and creating dialogues that challenge mainstream media bias (Carlson, 2017). It is one of the first instances of a rotating Twitter account in which different hosts use the platform to reach new audiences (Sweet, Pearson, & Dudgeon, 2013: 105). The account emphasises diverse Indigenous voices of those who are not commonly reported in mainstream media. Gamilaroi man Luke Pearson, the account’s creator, reflects on how the account was made in response to conversations he had about “the national dialogue and media representation, and how there was very low diversity of representation. There was something like four or five Aboriginal people who the media went to [for comment]” (Deans, 2018). Wonnarua/Wangkamarra/Kunia woman Shirlee Lawson used her last post of hosting

@IndigenousX to declare that “structural change is required if we are really going to make a noticeable reduction in Indigenous suicides. That’s why I support #UluruStatement. Our political location plays a significant role in the quality of our lives. Incl housing, jobs etc.” (@LawsonShiralee, 2018).

In 2020, the Uluru Dialogue (a group of advocates based at the UNSW Indigenous Law Centre) collaborated with SBS Radio to translate the Uluru Statement into 64 languages, making it available as both written statements and recorded podcasts (Power, 2020). Social media plays an integral role in ensuring that the message of the Uluru Statement is accessible to all Australians, especially since one in five residents are born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Engaging migrant and multicultural communities is an important aspect of building campaign awareness and is particularly effective in the Australian context as Indigenous activists share common lived experiences as minority groups (Dunn, 2020). Migrant populations also have acute awareness of language’s importance in maintaining cultural and ethnic identity, with Davis commenting that “the translation project is really important because, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we know that your language is fundamental to who you are as a human being and what your culture is” (Power, 2020). The podcasts complement the Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Councils of Australia’s (FECCA) own endeavour to build better relationships and promote reconciliation between Indigenous and ethnically diverse populations (FECCA, 2019).

Conclusion

Social media, online forums, and digital media platforms have proven effective in dispersing information and building public awareness of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. This is due to its ability to prioritise and centre Indigenous voices and perspectives, while reaching diverse

audiences via different mediums. Social media has allowed both invested activists and members of the public (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to transcend, call-out, and directly speak to bias, racism, stereotype, misinformation, and colonial harm. This has allowed users to counter common distortions, such as those spread by prominent politicians who continue to present the Voice to Parliament as a “third chamber”. While an engaging and powerful force to mobilise and empower people, social media’s popularity as a political tool has arisen out of necessity. Its functions serve as a counterpoint to hegemonic, predominantly white, discourses that too often shroud, ignore and silence Indigenous perspectives.

By turning to social media, Indigenous peoples are demanding and enacting their empowered voices through highlighting Black visibility and creating social networks that celebrate and thrive on the diversity of opinion. Social media has demonstrated the power of Indigenous voice. Through campaigning for the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and its accompanying demand for a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament, Indigenous peoples are calling for the representation they have forged for themselves on social media to translate into meaningful structural reform in Australia’s constitution. Similarly, social media allows all people (for better or worse) to have their say, should they choose to participate in the conversation. It is time for the Australian government to extend this right to the Australian population, by taking the question of constitutional reform to the public via a referendum.

References

- @DrRimmer (2019, 12 July 2019). Minister misrepresents the Uluru Statement [Twitter]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/DrRimmer/status/1149636798391259136?s=20>
- @LawsonShiralee (2018, 22 Nov 2018). As my last tweet for this week, structural change is required [Twitter].

- @LindaBurneyMP (2018, 15 Feb 2018). I am concerned by PM's description of #IndigenousVoice as third chamber [Twitter]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/LindaBurneyMP/status/963894381102034944?s=20>
- Anderson, P., Davis, M., & Pearson, N. (2017, 20 Oct). Don't silence our Voice, minister: Uluru leaders condemn backward step. *The Sydney Morning Herald* Retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/national/don-t-silence-our-voice-minister-uluru-leaders-condemn-backward-step-20191020-p532h0.html>
- Appleby, G., Buxton-Namisnyk, E., Larkin, D. (2021). Indigenous voice co-design process: An expert analysis of the NIAA public consultations. University of New South Wales: Indigenous Law Centre. Retrieved from <https://apo.org.au/node/312976>
- Appleby, G., & Davis, M. (2018). The Uluru statement and the promises of truth. *Australian Historical Studies*, 49(4), 501-509. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2018.1523838>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). Census reveals a fast changing, culturally diverse nation. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/media%20release3>
- Australian Government. (2021). Submission - Indigenous Voice. Retrieved from <https://haveyoursay.voice.niaa.gov.au/submissions>
- Bargallie, D. (2020). *Unmasking the racial contract: Indigenous voices on racism in the Australian Public Service*: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Callinan, T. (2014, 27 Aug). Remote Indigenous Australians rely on Facebook to stay in touch. *NITV*. Retrieved from <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/article/2014/08/26/remote-indigenous-australians-rely-facebook-stay-touch>
- Carlson, B. (2013). The 'new frontier': Emergent Indigenous identities and social media. In M. Harris, M. Nakata, and B. Carlson (Eds), *The Politics of Identity: Emerging Indigeneity* (pp. 147-168). Sydney: University of Technology Sydney E-Press. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.5130/978-0-9872369-2-0>
- Carlson, B. (2017, 17 Oct). 12 deadly Indigenous Australian social media users to follow. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/12-deadly-indigenous-australian-social-media-users-to-follow-66479>
- Carlson, B. (2018, 5 Apr). Indigenous voices are speaking loudly on social media but racism endures. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/indigenous-voices-are-speaking-loudly-on-social-media-but-racism-endures-94287>
- Carlson, B. (2019). Disrupting the master narrative: Indigenous people and tweeting colonial history. *Griffith REVIEW*(64), 224-234. Retrieved from <https://www.griffithreview.com/articles/disrupting-master-narrative-indigenous-tweeting-colonial-history/>
- Carlson, B., Browning, D., Finlay, S. M., Clarke, A., & Husband, D. (2018). Deterritorialising media: resilience and activism. *Communication research and practice*, 4(1), 4-16. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2018.1438166>
- Carlson, B., & Frazer, R. (2018). *Social Media Mob: Being Indigenous Online*. In. Retrieved from <https://research->

management.mq.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/85013179/MQU_SocialMediaMob_report_Carlson_Frazer.pdf

- Centre for Governance and Public Policy. (2017, 30 October 2017). OmniPoll Australian Constitutional Values Survey 2017. *Griffith University: Centre for Governance and Public Policy*. Retrieved from <https://news.griffith.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Griffith-University-UNSW-Australian-Constitutional-Values-Survey-Sept-2017-Results-2.pdf>
- Chrysanthos, N. (2019, 20 Oct 2019). 'Uncertainty and cause for concern': Uluru Statement leaders voice disapproval at Wyatt. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/uncertainty-and-cause-for-concern-uluru-statement-leaders-voice-disapproval-at-wyatt-20191020-p532hd.html>
- Davidson, H. (2017, 12 Dec). 'Elaborately dishonest': Turnbull remarks on Indigenous voice to parliament cause anger. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/dec/12/indigenous-voice-malcolm-turnbull-remarks-anger>
- Davis, M. (2018a). The long road to Uluru: Walking together: Truth before justice. *Griffith Review*(60).
- Davis, M. (2018b, Jul). Voice, Treaty, Truth. *The Monthly*. Retrieved from <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2018/july/1530367200/megan-davis/voice-treaty-truth>
- Davis, M. (2019a, October 2019). No time for the meek. *The Monthly*. Retrieved from <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2019/october/1569370776/megan-davis/no-time-meek#mtr>
- Davis, M. (2019b). Quarterly Essay Number 69 Moment of Truth. *Quarterly Essay*. Retrieved from <https://www.quarterlyessay.com.au/content/correspondence-megan-davis>
- Davis, M., & Williams, G. (2021). *Everything You Need to Know about the Uluru Statement from the Heart*. Sydney, New South Wales: UNSW Press.
- Dawson, E., & McCalman, J. (2020). *What happens next? : reconstructing Australia after COVID-19*. Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press.
- Deans, A. (2018, 16 Jul). 'We would have been the first rotating Twitter account in the world'. *Money*. Retrieved from <https://www.moneymag.com.au/luke-pearson-indigenous-x>
- Doran, M. (2020, 15 Nov). Minister Ken Wyatt wants Indigenous voice to government to pass Parliament before next election. *ABC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-15/ken-wyatt-wants-indigenous-voice-laws-to-pass-before-election/12885306>
- Dreher, T., McCallum, K., & Waller, L. (2016). Indigenous voices and mediatized policy-making in the digital age. *Information, communication & society*, 19(1), 23-39. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1093534>
- Dunn, A. (2020, 5 November 2020). SBS has translated the Uluru Statement from the Heart for Australia's multicultural communities ahead of NAIDOC Week. *SBS News*.

- Retrieved from <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/the-uluru-statement-from-the-heart-has-been-translated-into-more-than-60-languages>
- FECCA. (2019). *Encouragin Engagement A guide for multicultural organisations to engage in reconciliation: Consultation Draft*. Retrieved from <https://fecca.org.au/reconciliation/>
- Fogarty, W., Bulloch, H., McDonnell, S., & Davis, M. (2018a). Deficit discourse and Indigenous health: How narrative framings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are reproduced in policy. Victoria: Lowitja Institute. Reterived from <https://www.lowitja.org.au/page/services/resources/Cultural-and-social-determinants/racism/Deficit-Discourse-and-Indigenous-Health>
- Fogarty, W., Lovell, M., Langenberg, J., & Heron, M.-J. (2018b). Deficit discourse and strengths-based approaches: changing the narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing. Victoria: Lowitja Institute. Reterived from <https://www.lowitja.org.au/page/services/resources/Cultural-and-social-determinants/racism/deficit-discourse-strengths-based>
- Ford, M., & Blumer, C. (2016, 20 May 2016). Vote Compass: Most Australians Back Constitutional Recognition for Indigenous Australians. *ABC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-20/vote-compass-indigenous-recognition/7428030?nw=0>
- Fredericks, B. (2009). Look before you leap: The epistemic violence that sometimes hides behind the word “inclusion”. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 38(S1), 10-16. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1375/S1326011100000776>
- Fredericks, B. (2021, 23 Mar 2021). An Indigenous Voice: The time for action is now! *Westender*. Retrieved from <https://westender.com.au/an-indigenous-voice-the-time-for-action-is-now/>
- Fredericks, B., & Bradfield, A. (2020). We don't want to go back to 'normal', when 'normal' wasn't good for everyone. *Axon*, 10(2). Retrieved from <https://axonjournal.com.au/issue-vol-10-no-2-dec-2020/we-don-t-want-go-back-normal-when-normal-wasn-t-good-everyone>
- Fredericks, B., & Bradfield, A. (2021a). ‘More than a thought bubble...’: The Uluru Statement from the Heart and an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. *M/C Journal*, 24(1). Retrieved from <https://journal.m7edia-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/2738>
- Fredericks, B., & Bradfield, A. (2021b). ‘Waiting with Bated Breath’: Navigating the Monstrous World of Online Racism. *M/C Journal* 24(5): <https://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/2825>
- Fredericks, B., & Bradfield, A. (2021c). Co-Designing Change: Discussing an Indigenous Voice to Parliament and Constitutional Reform in Australia. *M/C Journal* 24(4): <https://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/2801>
- Fredericks, B., Bradfield, A., Nguyen, J., & Ansell, S. (2021). Disrupting the colonial algorithm: Indigenous Australia and social media. *Media International Australia*, October 2021. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1329878X211038286>

- Fredericks, B., & White, N. (2018). Using bridges made by others as scaffolding and establishing footings for those that follow: Indigenous women in the Academy. *Australian Journal of Education*, 62(3), 243-255.
- Fredericks, B., White, N., Phillips, S., Bunda, R., Longbottom, M., & Bargallie, D. (2019). Being Ourselves, Naming Ourselves, Writing Ourselves: Indigenous Australian Women Disrupting What It IS to BE Academic Within the Academy, in Louise, M. Thomas and Anne B. Reinertsen, eds, *Academic Writing And Identity Constructions. Performativity, Space and Territory in Academic Workplaces*, Palgrave Macmillan, Switzerland, pp.75-96.
- From the Heart. (2020). Interactive Uluru Statement From the Heart. Retrieved from <https://fromtheheart.com.au/explore-the-uluru-statement/>
- Gainsford, A. (2018). Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Hansard.
- Gaykamangu, J. G. (2012). Ngarra law: Aboriginal customary law from Arnhem Land. *Northern Territory Law Journal*, 2(4), 236-248.
- Geia, L., Hayes, B., & Usher, K. (2013). Yarning/Aboriginal storytelling: Towards an understanding of an Indigenous perspective and its implications for research practice. *Contemporary nurse*, 46(1), 13-17. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.2013.46.1.13>
- Geia L and Sweet M (2015) IHMayDay: showcasing Indigenous knowledge and innovation. *13th National Rural Health Conference, Darwin Convention Centre*. Retrieved from http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/13nrhc/images/paper_Geia%2C%20Lynore.pdf
- Geia, L., Pearson, L., & Sweet, M. (2017). Narratives of Twitter as a platform for professional development, innovation, and advocacy. *Australian Psychologist*, 52(4), 280-287. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/ap.12279>
- Gooley, C. (2021, 17 Mar). Indigenous leader Noel Pearson continues push for constitutional recognition and Voice to Parliament. *ABC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-17/noel-pearson-speech-indigenous-constitutional-recognition/13256956>
- Gregory, F. (2021, 5 Mar). 'We are pioneers,' Fallon Gregory on Blak visibility in social media. *National Indigenous Times*. Retrieved from <https://nit.com.au/we-are-pioneers-fallon-gregory-on-blak-visibility-in-social-media/>
- Grieve-Williams, V. (2020). 'We Have Survived the White Man's World': A Critical Review of Aboriginal Australian Activism in Media and Social Media. *From Sit-Ins to# revolutions: Media and the Changing Nature of Protests*, 19.
- Harris, R. (2021, 18 Mar). 'Not our policy': Scott Morrison rejects push for referendum on Voice. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/not-our-policy-scott-morrison-rejects-push-for-referendum-on-voice-20210318-p57bxc.html>
- Heiss, A. (2020, 8 Jan). The surge in sales of Indigenous books is heartening but education takes many forms. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jun/25/the-surge-in-sales-of-indigenous-books-is-heartening-but-education-takes-many-forms>

- Karp, P. (2018, 26 September). Scott Morrison claims Indigenous voice to parliament would be a third chamber. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/26/scott-morrison-claims-indigenous-voice-to-parliament-would-be-a-third-chamber>
- Knowles, R. (2021, 19 Mar 2021). Prime Minister says no 'mainstream support' for constitutional recognition, ignores Uluru Statement. *National Indigenous Times*. Retrieved from <https://nit.com.au/prime-minister-says-no-mainstream-support-for-constitutional-recognition-ignores-uluru-statement/>
- Langton, M. (2011). Anthropology, politics and the changing world of Aboriginal Australians. *Anthropological Forum* 21(1). Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2011.549447>
- Larkin, D., & Galloway, K. (2018). Uluru Statement from the Heart: Australian Public Law Pluralism. *Bond L. Rev.*, 30, 335. Retrieved from <https://blr.scholasticahq.com/article/6796-uluru-statement-from-the-heart-australian-public-law-pluralism>
- Latimore, J. (2018). Changing the channel: Social media and the information wars. *Griffith Review* 60, pp. 50-57. Retrieved from <https://www.griffithreview.com/articles/changing-channel-social-media-information-wars-latimore-indigenoux/>
- Liddle, C. (2015, 15 June). Constitutional Recognition Survey. *IndigenousX*. Retrieved from <https://indigenoux.com.au/constitutional-recognition-survey/>
- Maddison, S. (2016). Recognise what?: Problems with the campaign for constitutional recognition. *Indigenous Law Bulletin*, 8(24), 20-24. Retrieved from <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.164154921010339>
- Martin, K., & Mirraboopa, B. (2003). Ways of knowing, being and doing: A theoretical framework and methods for indigenous and indigenist re-search. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 27(76), 203-214. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/14443050309387838>
- McQuire, A. (2019). National accounts: Black and white witness. *Meanjin*, 78(2), 1-6. Retrieved from <https://meanjin.com.au/essays/black-and-white-witness/>
- McQuire, A. (2020, 23 July). We must build upon the foundations of Black media. *IndigenousX*. Retrieved from <https://indigenoux.com.au/we-must-build-upon-the-foundations-of-black-media/>
- McInerney, M. (2020). Time to resume national conversation on the Uluru Statement that was denied to Australians. *Croakey*. Retrieved from <https://www.croakey.org/time-to-resume-national-conversation-on-uluru-statement-that-was-denied-to-australians/>
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2009). Imagining the good indigenous citizen: Race war and the pathology of patriarchal white sovereignty. *Cultural studies review*, 15(2), 61-79. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5130/csr.v15i2.2038>
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2011). The white man's burden: Patriarchal white epistemic violence and Aboriginal women's knowledges within the academy. *Australian feminist studies*, 26(70), 413-431. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2011.621175>

- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2015). *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*: University of Minnesota Press.
- National Constitutional Convention. (2017). Uluru Statement from the Heart. Retrieved from <https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/event/first-nations-regional-dialogue-in-uluru.html>
- Pearson, N. (2017, Dec 2017 - Jan 2018). “Betrayal”: The Turnbull Government has burned the bridge of bipartisanship. *The Monthly*. Retrieved from <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2017/december/1512046800/noel-pearson/betrayal>
- Power, J. (2020, 6 November 2020). Uluru Statement: Invitation to walk from heart extended in 64 languages. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/national/uluru-statement-invitation-to-walk-from-heart-extended-in-64-languages-20201105-p56byg.html>
- Reconciliation Australia. (2018). Recognise Campaign Successful in Raising Awareness. Retrieved from <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/recognise-campaign-successful-in-raising-awareness/>
- Reconciliation Australia. (2020). *2020 Australian Reconciliation Barometer*. Retrieved from https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/australian_reconciliation_barometer_2020_-full-report_web.pdf
- Reconciliation NSW. (2021). Uluru Statement: Voice - Treaty - Truth. Retrieved from https://reconciliationnsw.org.au/voice_treaty_truth/
- Referendum Council. (2017). *Final report of the Referendum Council*. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Australia). Retrieved from https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/report_attachments/Referendum_Council_Final_Report.pdf
- Remeikis, A. (2019a, 18 July). Barnaby Joyce 'apologises' for calling Indigenous voice a third chamber of parliament. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/jul/18/barnaby-joyce-apologises-for-calling-indigenous-voice-a-third-chamber-of-parliament>
- Remeikis, A. (2019b). Peter Dutton rules out voice to parliament, labelling it a 'third chamber'. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/jul/12/peter-dutton-rules-out-voice-to-parliament-labelling-it-a-third-chamber>
- Rigney, L.-I. (2001). A first perspective of Indigenous Australian participation in science: Framing Indigenous research towards Indigenous Australian intellectual sovereignty. *Kaurna Higher Education Journal* 7, 1-13.
- Rolls, M. (2011). The 'Great Australian Silence', the 'Cult of Forgetfulness' and the Hegemony of Memory. *Zeitschrift für Australienstudien / Australian Studies Journal* 25: 7–26. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.35515/zfa/asj.25/2011.02>
- Rubenstein, K. (2018). Power, control and citizenship: The Uluru Statement from the Heart as active citizenship. *Bond Law Review*, 30(1), 19-30.
- Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*: Vintage.

- Smith, L. T. (2013). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*: Zed Books Ltd.
- Sweet, M., Pearson, L., & Dudgeon, P. (2013). @IndigenousX: A case study of community-led innovation in digital media. *Media international Australia incorporating Culture & policy*, 149(149), 104-111. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1329878X1314900112>
- Thomas, A., Jakubowicz, A., & Norman, H. (2019). *Does the media fail Aboriginal political aspirations? 45 years of news media reporting of key political moments*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Twomey, A. (2019, July 17). Changing the Australian Constitution was always meant to be difficult – here's why. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/changing-the-australian-constitution-was-always-meant-to-be-difficult-heres-why-119162>
- UNSW Sydney. (2020). Voice: Uluru Dialogue Seminar Series. Retrieved from <https://www.nuragili.unsw.edu.au/voice-uluru-dialogue-seminar-series>
- Vatsikopoulos, H. (2015, 29 April). Whitewash? That's not the colour of the SBS charter. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/whitewash-thats-not-the-colour-of-the-sbs-charter-40837>
- Viellaris, R. (2017, 25 October 2017). Malcolm Turnbull risks war with Labor and indigenous groups after rejecting Referendum Council's 'radical' blueprint. *The Courier-Mail*. Retrieved from <https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/malcolm-turnbull-risks-war-with-labor-and-indigenous-groups-after-rejecting-referendum-councils-radical-blueprint/news-story/73d412b9562eda3efb28affaaa42b02f>
- Wahlquist, C. (2017a, 29 May 2017). Barnaby Joyce Criticised for Misinterpreting Proposed Indigenous Voice to Parliament. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/may/29/barnaby-joyce-criticised-for-misinterpreting-proposed-indigenous-voice-to-parliament>
- Wahlquist, C. (2017b, 26 October 2017). Turnbull's Uluru Statement Rejection is 'Mean-Spirited Bastardry' – Legal Expert. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/oct/26/turnbulls-uluru-statement-rejection-mean-spirited-bastardry-legal-expert>
- Wilson, A., Carlson, B. L., & Sciascia, A. (2017). Reterritorialising social media: Indigenous people rise up. *Australasian Journal of Information Systems*, 21. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3127/ajis.v21i0.1591>
- Yaxley, L., & Conifer, D. (2017, 29 May). Barnaby Joyce says Indigenous chamber in Parliament 'just won't fly' with Australians. *ABC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-05-29/indigenous-chamber-parliament-wont-fly-barnaby-joyce-says/8568068>
- Yunupingu, G. (2016, Jul). Rom Watangu: An Indigenous leader Reflects on a Lifetime Following the Law of the Land. *The Monthly*. Retrieved from <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2016/july/1467295200/galarwuy-yunupingu/rom-watangu#mtr>

Zillman, S. (2017, 30 October 2017). Indigenous Advisory Body Would Be Supported By Australians, Survey Finds. *ABC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-30/australians-would-support-referendum-indigenous-voice-parliament/9101106>