

# Understanding the Changing Cultural Value of the BBC World Service and the British Council

Marie Gillespie, Simon Bell, Colin Wilding, Alban Webb, Ali Fisher, Alex Voss, Andrew W M Smith, Jess Macfarlane, Nat Martin, Tot Foster, Ilia Lvov



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## Executive Summary

This project investigated the changing cultural value of the BBC World Service (WS) and the British Council (BC) and how their cultural value can be assessed and measured. For eight decades, these organisations have been the face and voice of Britain overseas. Our research found that their attraction and influence abroad remains strong, but is on the wane, reflecting the UK's declining economic and political significance on the world stage.

Among the key findings of our historical and contemporary research: Cultural value is the catalyst of all aspects of value at WS and BC, founded on their capacity to act as transcultural intermediaries, fostering international understanding, and setting benchmarks in global standards for journalism and cultural relations work. Cultural value is relational, never independent of political and economic value. It is perspectival: audiences trust the quality and credibility of outputs; high professional standards and prestige benefit staff; funders appreciate the diplomatic and soft power assets. Cultural value accrues slowly over time but can be quickly lost.

Social media afford new ways of connecting, informing and engaging citizens at home and abroad. Our case studies analysing the uses of Twitter and Facebook by BC and WS around global media events underscore the so far limited role of social media in democratising participation and promoting intercultural dialogue.

We developed an innovative, theoretically grounded and empirically informed Cultural Value Model (CVM). This is an innovative device for conceptualising, analysing and assessing value in a multidimensional, composite, visual way. The CVM is designed for planning, monitoring and evaluating projects and organisations over time, alongside existing performance indicators and impact measures. It is currently being tested and developed on further projects at WS and BC as well as at the Swedish Institute.

## Key words

British Council, BBC World Service, international broadcasting, public diplomacy, Cultural Value Model, social media, citizenship, cosmopolitanism.

## Researchers and Project Partners

The Research Team included: Marie Gillespie, Simon Bell, Colin Wilding, Alban Webb, Ali Fisher, Alex Voss, Andrew W M Smith, Jess Macfarlane, Nat Martin, Tot Foster, Ilia Lvov, Waheed Mirza, Dalal Jebriil (further details in the appendix).

Project Partners included: BBC World Service, British Council, Media Action, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Conference of International Broadcasting Audience Researchers, Swedish Institute.

Project website: visit our project website to access the research reports and working papers on which this synoptic report is based, and for details of case studies, publications and project events: <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/diasporas/cvp>.

Further information contact Principal Investigator: [marie.gillespie@open.ac.uk](mailto:marie.gillespie@open.ac.uk).

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## Introduction

Culture, as Raymond Williams pointed out in *Keywords*, is one of the most complicated words in the English language (1976: 87). Add to it the term value, which is almost equally polyvalent, and we are faced with a considerable analytical and methodological challenge. Our project aimed at understanding the changing cultural value of the BBC World Service (WS) and the British Council (BC) at a critical moment in their history. These key national-to-global institutions have been the voice and face of Britain overseas for some eight decades, connecting overseas publics to the UK and in so doing bringing a range of economic, political and cultural benefits to Britain. Our main argument is that cultural value – the communicative, connective and creative benefits that these organisations generate in interaction with their audiences and users – is the catalyst of all other forms of value. However, it is not recognised as such because economic and other instrumental forms of value dominate current thinking and models of assessment. Our Cultural Value Model (CVM) redresses this imbalance and provokes new ways of thinking about and doing assessment.

Until recently, WS and BC were funded by Grant-in-Aid by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) as two key cultural components of the UK's diplomatic infrastructure. Since April 2014, the WS has been funded by the licence fee payer as part of the BBC's Global News Division. The BC now gets only 25% of its funding from the FCO. Shifts in funding and governance, combined with the impacts of new communications technologies and new configurations of global publics, mean that these organisations are at a critical time of change. Their value is being questioned from a number of directions. How can the use of public money to benefit overseas publics be justified at a time of domestic austerity? Economic returns and accountability, concepts of culture and ethos, the very concept of public service itself, are issues at the centre of public debate about how we understand and value these organisations (Gillespie 2014a, 2014b; Webb 2014b). This project is therefore timely.

BC and WS are very well-known and respected abroad. But 'at home' in the UK, awareness of their activities is negligible. Little academic research has been done into the cultural value they generate and channel, although this project was able to build upon seven years' prior research into WS at The Open University (Gillespie and Webb 2012). Our project connected in a dynamic way two key components of cultural value set out by the AHRC's call for proposals: i) 'understanding cultural value in an international setting', and (ii) 'fostering reflective individuals and engaged citizens'. This was an ambitious project in aiming not just to deliver a new academic understanding of the ways in which BC and WS in their interactions with users and audiences generate cultural value abroad and at home, but a practical product to help these and other organisations conceive and assess cultural value.

## Conceiving Cultural Value

We use the term ‘cultural value’ to encompass the multi-dimensional nature of the benefits that BC and WS bring to citizens overseas and in the UK via their interactions and activities. Cultural value has many components but at the heart of the matter are the *creative, communicative and connective benefits* that these organisations bring to audiences and funders, as well as to the organisations themselves and other stakeholders (Negus and Pickering 2004).

Given the size, complexity and international dimensions of our chosen organisations, our project required a broad, encompassing definition of culture, adequate to the task of bringing under one umbrella the journalistic ethos and culture of the WS and the cultural relations mission of the BC. Raymond Williams’ tripartite delineation of culture as civilisation, as signifying or symbolic system, and as way of life, in the anthropological sense (1976: 87-93) proved useful in resisting elitist, narrowly circumscribed accounts of culture. The overall value of WS lies in embodying, representing and projecting key elements of British culture and policy (diplomatic and soft power value), that bring indirect commercial benefits to the UK (economic value), as well as facilitating encounters and exchanges between British and overseas citizens and organisations (utility and engagement value). Other forms of value can thus be said to be entailed by cultural value.

The place of economic value in assessments of cultural activities is controversial (Arts Council England 2014; O’Brien 2010, 2014; Crossick and Kaszynska 2014). We recognise the mutually constitutive relationship between cultural and economic value. As ‘entrepreneurial public service’ organisations, both BC and WS operate according to market principles and seek competitive advantage, while adhering to long-standing public service principles. They have relative operational, creative and editorial autonomy from government and are founded on cherished ethical values. The BBC’s defining editorial value, impartiality, is enshrined in the BBC’s Charter and Agreement (BBC 2014). The BC’s foundational principle, mutuality, has been the bedrock of its ethos since its inception (Rose and Wadham-Smith 2004). At the same time, these are state-funded organisations with a national identity and an ideological orientation (western liberal democracy) and are seen as such abroad. We needed a dynamic, relational concept of cultural value in order to articulate interrelated components of value (cultural, economic and political), and transcend the unhelpful dichotomies that permeate cultural value debates (intrinsic versus instrumental value; high versus popular culture; culture as civilisation versus way of life).

Our early workshops for this project drew in a wide range of WS and BC staff and drew upon current debates on cultural value in order to identify core components of value from diverse perspectives. We used an innovative methodological approach called Imagine – a set of participatory methods, developed over the last couple of decades, aimed at imagining and enacting organisational innovation with a focus on the sustainability of good practice by means of visual representations or Rich Pictures (Bell, Correa Pena, and Prem 2013; Bell and Morse 2008).

Our concept of cultural value had to be theoretically informed and empirically grounded if our Cultural Value Model (CVM) was going to be robust and relevant, provocative and practical. It had to be as rich and as complex as the organisations that we studied. It had to include notions of



discrimination and judgement because we and our interlocutors at WS and BC (with whom we co-created the model) recognised that there are firm, even objective professional standards according to which the quality of a news broadcast or a BC cultural event could be judged. Even if such judgements are always open to contestation, our historical analyses clearly illustrate that WS and BC set international quality standards in their core activities in international broadcasting and cultural relations.

We also were aware that many of those with whom we worked at WS and BC invariably elided the concepts of value and values. A common view was that cultural value was the product of organisational values: impartiality and credibility; trust and empathy, fair play and the rule of law, democratic rights of individual citizens. So what was there to research? At WS, some of our interlocutors also drew sharp distinctions between news and information and culture. In the words of one former WS member of staff: 'International news is to culture what feeding the starving is to gastronomy'. Good quality, trustworthy international news is a public necessity and a human right, but not thought of as part of the cultural field. This widespread view conforms to Williams' definition of culture as civilisation. But for this project we required his broader understanding of culture as including news media production and consumption as salient to ways of (professional and other) life.

Cross-cultural communication clearly lies at the heart of the very different activities of BC and WS. BC had no difficulty at all in understanding their activities in cultural terms. After all, BC sees itself as a global leader in cultural relations – or what one BC worker referred to in an interview as the 'soft side of diplomacy and foreign policy'. Leaving aside the depiction of culture as 'soft' – common in debates about 'soft power' –, cross-cultural relations and promoting international understanding with a UK focus is the *sine qua non* of both BC and WS. An interviewee at WS put it thus: 'International news is the main artery of culture because it shapes how we understand and see the world. If consuming and sharing national news helps create national communities – talking about ourselves and our place in the world – then international news is vital to understand the wider world, otherwise we'd live in a national cocoon.' This view underscores the fact the national value of the BC and WS and what we call their cosmopolitan value go hand in hand.

The cultural value of these organisations must be understood and assessed in terms of the extent to which they succeed in their aims of promoting cross-cultural understanding, and the accompanying cosmopolitan virtues of world openness and cultural internationalism (Appiah 2006, Hannerz 1990, Vertovec 2002). In our prior research on the WS we coined the term 'corporate cosmopolitanism' to refer to the very specific brand of colonially rooted, institutionally bred cosmopolitanism which has been engendered by WS activities of translation, transmission, transposition and transformation (Gillespie et al. 2010a; Baumann, Gillespie and Sreberny 2010; Sreberny 2010). But cosmopolitan value is not part of the vocabulary of assessment currently used by either WS or BC. Instead, we find terms like reach, impact, quality and engagement. Emic and etic terms rarely coalesce. The dialogue between researchers' conceptual frameworks and those of research subjects must be negotiated in participatory forms of research. The aim here was the collaborative creation of a new model of assessment that would shift the focus from key performance indicators (KPI) and impact assessments, to a richer understanding of value and its components.

## The Cultural Value Model

In devising a suitable set of components of cultural value with our interlocutors, we wanted to include carefully defined aspirational components of cultural value, such as cosmopolitanism, as well as more conventionally used and assessed concepts such as reach and engagement. Our Cultural Value Model (CVM) was to be co-created and used by the organisations, flexibly adapted according to context and need. This was not just an academic exercise. Our Imagine workshops were the first step in fulfilling that ambition.

A key aim of our CVM was to offer a tool for investigating how value is conceived, articulated and assessed, over time, in the dynamic triangular relationship between (i) the audiences, (ii) the organisations themselves and (iii) their funders. The notion of a cultural value triangle has been at the heart of all our research (Wilding 2013). The core assumption is that the value of an organisation is different for different individuals, and for different groups of people. How people talk about value depends on who they are – and on who is asking and why – while all judgements are made within the frame of conventional hierarchies and distinctions, standards and benchmarks of value. A coherent analysis of the way value is envisioned and articulated for and at WS and BC must be clear about viewpoint – who is attributing value, to whom, in what context. This is as much an ethnographic as a philosophical point. These insights drawn from our prior research were vital as we set about developing our CVM.

Four research strands proceeded simultaneously:

- **Imagine workshops** at BC and WS: four workshops were hosted during the course of our research (October 2013- June 2014) each with 30-50 past and present employees drawn from different echelons in each organisation, and major stakeholder organisations, to glean participants' perspectives on cultural value.  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/diasporas/cvp/events>
- **Archival analyses** of WS and BC corporate and policy documents in the post-1945 period  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/diasporas/cvp/case-studies/historical>
- **Digital case studies** to understand how WS and BC engages with audiences via social media, chiefly Twitter: (i) The London and Sochi Olympics; (ii) the conflict in Syria in August 2013; (iii) WS's 100 Women Project, October 2013; (iv) WS coverage of the Baluchistan earthquake, September 2013; (v) BC's South Asia Season; (vi) BC's Facebook Learn English Group for Middle East and North Africa  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/diasporas/cvp/case-studies>
- **Cultural Value Model:** The above three strands of research fed into the iterative and participatory process of developing the CVM. We engaged BC and WS staff as well as interested parties from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Conference of International Broadcasting Audience Researchers (CIBAR) in over 30 individual and small group interviews, as well as events where we presented tailor-made reports on the CVM and invited feedback. For example, we hosted a major public debate and a conference at which

we presented our interim report for WS just prior the shift to licence fee funding. At BC's Offices in London we held a seminar/webinar for some 50 members of staff who attended in person, and over 100 participants from 12 countries who attended online fielding questions from BC staff in India, Nigeria and Egypt among other countries.

The project brought together a multidisciplinary team with expertise in anthropology and ethnography, cultural sociology, postcolonial and cosmopolitan cultural theory, digital humanities, history, international relations, maths and computing science, science and technology studies and systems science. We created innovative methodological designs for our empirical case studies, as a means of developing our Cultural Value Model (see Appendix for details of methodological innovation). The case studies were important in themselves but their primary function was to use them to test and develop our model (rather than using the model to evaluate the projects).

Our CVM goes beyond functionalist and instrumentalist approaches that rely on one-off, box-ticking surveys to satisfy funders' accountability procedures. The CVM is currently being tested further at WS and at BC as well as at its counterpart in Sweden – the Swedish Institute. This reflects a welcome degree of interest in the CVM and a willingness to experiment with it and adapt it for specific purposes and projects, using our prior case studies to build a picture of value over time.

## **Understanding Changing Cultural Value**

Our research and the design of our Cultural Value Model (CVM) are underpinned by an understanding of several key aspects of continuity and change at WS and BC:

First, the relative editorial, creative and operational autonomy of BC and WS from government control has lent their activities credibility and authority, and enabled them to forge a consistent ethics of practice that has guided generations of WS and BC professionals through political crises, wars, turmoil and tragedy. This professional ethos and its associated organisational memory, transmitted across generations, have been vital to the establishment of an enduring, trusted and credible presence around the world (Gillespie, Webb and Baumann 2007). As the face and voice of the UK overseas, staff at BC and WS have managed to create a sense of intimate 'friendship' with their audiences and users, as our witness seminars and ethnographic research abundantly demonstrate (Gillespie et al. 2010a and 2010b). This effect of intimacy among WS audiences results in part from WS's journalistic ethics, in part from the aesthetic value of radio broadcasts in up to 44 languages, and the range of cultural programming that was a feature of earlier WS broadcasting (Webb 2014). The trope of 'trusted friend' permeates letters from audiences and users of BC and WS as well as government reports from the 1930s onwards. The point is that trust and credibility is a combined effect of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of WS and BC operations.

Second, over the last eight decades, organisational funding and focus have shifted according to strategic, market and technological imperatives. The strategic context has shifted from Imperial to Post-Imperial, from Second World War to Cold War. BBC Language Services are opened and closed, grown or shrunk in accordance with strategic agendas. Since 2001 and the 'War on Terror' there has

been a shift in funding and focus to the Middle East (Sreberny, Gillespie and Baumann 2010). The market context also shifts. WS and BC used to have a strong presence in countries with underdeveloped markets in broadcasting or English Language Teaching (the main source of income for the BC, on which Arts and Scientific activities hinge). They now operate in much more competitive markets and have to calibrate their operations accordingly. Similarly, technological innovation reframes value. For WS, shifts from Short Wave to FM, then the rise of TV as the primary source of news, alongside developments in web-based interactive technologies and social media, demand new vocabularies of value and methods for assessing success or failure.

Third, the cosmopolitan cultural value of BC and WS is enshrined in the capacities of their staff to travel and translate (literally and symbolically) across national and ethnic, cultural and linguistic borders, as well as to dwell inside the cultures in which they operate (Clifford 1997). This dwelling and travelling was, at first, made possible because of the global network of imperial diplomats, military, civil service, entrepreneurs, as well as journalists, fixers, translators at the 'peripheries'. Staff overseas and at the metropolitan centre worked closely together, in asymmetric power relations. This imperial infrastructure facilitated the emergence of a colonial style cosmopolitan ethos and professional practices, which formed the basis of the global influence of WS and BC – at least until the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Fourth, the national interest is served by the cosmopolitan cultural value of BC and WS. These organisations project, promote, represent values that Britain seeks to uphold: freedom of speech, the rule of law, parliamentary democracy, the rights of individual citizens. They enable the UK to present itself and its policies, lifestyle, culture, economy and polity in a favourable light. This is their soft power effect. Soft power is rarely achieved by crude propaganda and WS and BC recognised this from their inception. They sought to attract overseas publics to British institutions (broadcasting, education, law) by exemplifying admirable principles in their practices. In so doing they invited and encouraged emulation. This has been a key animating source of the soft power of BC and WS. But such cultural value cannot be assessed in instrumental terms.

Finally, our collaborative research and analyses underscore the co-dependencies of instrumental and intrinsic value. These organisations deploy the intrinsic value of the cultural experiences they offer in order to 'also' achieve instrumental ends. Visits to the BC's libraries, exhibitions, events; new worlds opened up by learning English; the conversational value of listening to WS news bulletins; the aesthetic pleasures of the human voice; the cultural and arts programming that brought overseas publics closer to the UK; such work has attracted people to study, work, play and invest in the UK and has forged cosmopolitan cultural territories. The enduring significance of WS and BC lies in this rather subtle approach to communicating with overseas publics in idioms which they could understand and appreciate, while at the same time keeping funders satisfied, and making those who work for WS and BC proud to do so because of the international prestige that accompanied their jobs. Our CVM seeks to capture and assess these different dimensions of value in a practical, accessible but culturally sensitive way.

In our report we have interlaced the three focal areas of this project in sequence: (i) the historical context (ii) the methodological innovation (an account of the Cultural Value Model) and (iii) the supporting digital case studies. Our objective is to provide a detailed account of the journey to the present point.

**Part One** of the report situates the WS and BC in historical context, in terms of the perspectives of funders. We examine government-commissioned reviews of UK information and representational services in the post-war period. Government funding for WS and BC has always been strategic, but the strategies in question are subtle. This historical background sets the scene for a multi-component and multi-perspectival model of cultural value.

**Part Two** of the report explains our Cultural Value Model (CVM), its theoretical underpinnings and how it works in practice. This is the centrepiece of our project. The Cultural Value Model offers a combined narrative and discursive understanding of value. It addresses the practical need to develop a new generation of appropriate, culturally sensitive tools to assess the changing nature of value.

**Part Three** summarises the findings of our digital case studies, which were used to test and develop the CVM: research on Twitter and Facebook using social network analysis and other forms of social media monitoring. Further information on methodology and methodological advances can be found in the Appendix.

# Part I: Cultural Value in Historical Context

## Introduction

Long before ‘public diplomacy’ became the familiar term it is today, the influence exercised overseas by BBC World Service (WS) and the British Council (BC) had been a prized (and government-funded) asset of British foreign policy and diplomatic initiatives for several generations.<sup>1</sup> Established in 1932 and 1934, respectively, for eight decades their work in international broadcasting and cultural relations has been a principle means of engaging opinion abroad with British cultural, political and social thought and ambitions.

This report discusses how the cultural value of these institutions can be understood in historical context and the amorphous and contingent ways in which it is revealed as a significant and contributing factor in their perceived influence. Based on primary research into the regular, if somewhat *ad hoc*, government-commissioned reviews of British information and representational services since the Second World War, it takes as its central focus the triangular relationship between WS and BC, those who engage with their services, and the British government.

What emerges are a range of professional practices and capacities in which cultural value can be identified, alongside alternative categories of value – political, economic, diplomatic, trade – which have become synonymous with, and reliant on, the exercise of those practices and capacities. To this extent, cultural value is an important, though often hidden, component of the wider public value ascribed to the activities of BBC World Service and British Council, which animates the interaction with their audiences and users.

## Cultural Value

For both the British Council and BBC World Service, credibility and influence have accrued from consistency in the range and nature of the core services they have offered over the years. Sharing the UK’s ‘cultural assets’ (British Council 2013a: 7) has been the basis of the British Council’s work since its inception when its declared aims were

‘To promote abroad a wider appreciation of British culture and civilisation, by encouraging the study and use of the English language, and thereby, to extend knowledge of British literature and of the British contributions to music and the fine arts, the sciences, philosophic thought and political practice.’ (Donaldson 1984: 1)

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Public Diplomacy’ was coined in its modern-day form in 1965 by former American diplomat Edmund Gullion as ‘the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries’ (Cull 2006).

Likewise, for the World Service the provision of ‘accurate, impartial, and independent news’ (BBC Trust 2014: 2) alongside other forms of content, as its recent Operating Licence notes, remains, in the words of the BBC in 1945, the ‘kernel of all overseas broadcasting’ (BBC 1945).

As a Non-Departmental Public Body with core funding provided by government Grant-in-Aid, the British Council’s relational work in artistic, scientific, aid and educational fields has historically articulated British political, economic and social sensibilities. This process of ‘cultural wraparound’ has enabled the Council to support British interests with ‘the velvet glove of high culture’ in places and in contexts not normally amenable to conventional diplomatic overtures (Tickner 2012: 418 n.125). Meanwhile, fully funded by Grant-in-Aid (until April 2014), though editorially independent, the cultural value of the BBC World Service is less directly observed. It rests in the distinctive brand of the World Service, its working practices, genres of output, and in its staff. The cohabitation of editorial practices with the cosmopolitan outlook of its multinational workforce has enabled the World Service to speak, as an authoritative broadcaster, into the linguistic, national and imaginative idioms of its audiences. Moreover, the ability of the arts, sciences, training, education, and broadcasting to cross cultural, psychological and geographical borders has underwritten government funding of BC and WS. For their part, representing the British ‘national interest’ has been the implicit (and at times, uncomfortably explicit) *quid pro quo* of their fiscal support.

The historic proximity of the British Council and BBC World Service to the UK government (and the Foreign Office in particular), through their funding and strategic orientation, has always loomed as a potential weakness for both. Yet, it is their relative autonomy from government direction, especially in the conduct of day-to-day activities, which is so critical to their cultural credibility and, as a consequence, ability to act as a mediating force on the international stage. This governing dilemma has been a persistent theme throughout the history of both institutions: the balance between the security and protection afforded by Grant-in-Aid and the need to be at one remove from British government policy and action. One way of managing this has been to consider BC and WS as independent elements of a wider ‘package’ of UK overseas information and representational services that also include, for example, the Diplomatic Service. This approach to the ‘stacking’ of services to enhance their reach and value has also been a motivating force in the evolution of strategic communications within Whitehall and the attempt to manage the polyvalent nature of public diplomacy.

## **Political & Economic Value**

The reputation, reach and penetration achieved by BC and WS was of major significance to the British government as it considered the shape and purpose of its information services after the Second World War. This it did primarily in terms of the instrumental value to be extracted from continued funding of overseas activities. As the Report of the Drogheda Committee put it in 1954, ‘the aim of the Information Services must always be to achieve in the long run some definite political or commercial result’ (WAC R20/53 1953: 3). This outlook has been reflected in subsequent government and government-commissioned reviews of UK cultural and public diplomacy efforts.



Accordingly, the British Council and the BBC World Service have been obliged, over the years, to account for their services in these terms.

For the British Council, whose activities and remit are more closely aligned with the 'projection of Britain', this quickly became a core part of its reporting requirements. As the Council's Executive Committee put it in 1968, representations should be made to the Foreign Office to stress

'the contribution the Council can make to direct British interests and influence. In particular [...] its main purpose in developed and developing countries is to be a long-term means to dispose politicians, consumers, etc., etc., to think and buy British, and to resist the blandishments of our competitors' (Everett 1968).

For the BBC, relating output to such outcomes was, publicly at least, anathema and at odds with its editorial independence. As the Managing Director of the External Services (as the World Service was then called), Oliver Whitely, explained,

'The main value of the External Services is not that they may help to sell tractors or nuclear reactors, nor even that they may influence people in other countries, nobles or mobs, as to be more amenable to British diplomacy or foreign policy. Their main value is that ... they effectively represent and communicate this British propensity for truthfulness or the adherence to the individual right to the perception of reality.' (Briggs 1995: 711-712)

But, of course, it was precisely this 'international reputation for veracity', as the Foreign Office described it in 1970 that presented the British government with such 'a major weapon for the unimpeded presentation of British policies and views to both elite foreigners of influence and wider audiences' (Review of the BBC's External Services 1979). Meanwhile, playing with the perception that its broadcasts could assist British exports, the BBC often found it politically expedient to commission programmes in collaboration, for example, with the Board of Trade promoting trade and British technology overseas (BBC 1954: 7). Indeed, in 1979 the BBC even cited the example of a British truck firm that, as a direct consequence of a programme to Saudi Arabia, had received orders worth £2 million (BBC 1979: 49).

As Britain's role as a 'great power' waned in the decades after the Second World War and its economic significance, in relative terms, declined, 'national status was increasingly defined in cultural terms' (Tickner 2012: 400-401). Not only did this foreground the services and working practices of the British Council and the BBC World Service, but also magnified the perceived dividend to be extracted by government from its support of their activities. The point was made in the Foreign Office that 'effective presentation of information is now, and will become to a much greater extent, as vital an element of foreign and defence policy as, say, infantry battalions or naval escort vehicles' (Wigg 1967). This was certainly the case after the failure of British military adventurism during the Suez Canal crisis of 1956. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this particular episode resulted in a re-emphasis on funding BBC Arabic language services as colossal distrust of the British government in the Arabic world was counter-balanced by the penetration and credibility of BBC services to the region. Similarly, the diplomatic value of British Council English Language Teaching (ELT), and its ability to cultivate partnerships in developing nations, was to play an important role in maintaining a cultural



link with territories otherwise cut off from conventional diplomatic links, as was the case in Ghana in the mid-1960s.

Measuring the success of educational and exchange programmes, exhibitions and broadcasting in these terms could only ever be a narrow and essentially political expression of value, yet it dominated Twentieth-Century policy debates around the resourcing of information services. To a large extent it still does, but the shift in the last decade or so from the 'projection of Britain' to delivering 'influence' for the United Kingdom through 'work aiming to inform and engage individuals overseas' (Carter 2005), has begun to alter the terms of that debate (Wilton 2002; Carter (2005; HoL Soft Power Committee 2014). If realised, this is a welcome change in rhetoric for the British Council and the BBC World Service as it embraces the principles of relationship building and engaged dialogic practices that have underpinned their work for 80 years.

## **Strategic Context**

Historically, the value for money of the British Council and BBC World Service (that perennial mainstay of instrumental assessment) has been determined and framed by developments beyond the UK's borders, as much as by domestic concerns. The experience of the Second World War and then the Cold War underscored the significance of information services and cultural relations to British strategic priorities and national interests. In the transition from Empire to Commonwealth the Council and the World Service brokered new relationships of mutuality out of old imperial dependencies. Meanwhile, austerity Britain's post-war appetite to remain at the top table of world politics, without the resources to match, was powerfully served by the British Council's international status and leverage, the BBC's 'reputation for veracity' (Review of the BBC's External Services 1970), and the reflected prestige this has bestowed on the United Kingdom.

War, decolonisation, terrorism, economic crises and technological innovation have all left their mark on the demands successive British governments have made on the British Council and BBC World Service. Consequently, the rationale laid down by Whitehall to guide Britain's information and representational services overseas has reflected governmental anxieties and preoccupations just as much as the long-term capacities of BC/WS. This was evident in the Drogheda Report which argued for a shift away from Western European investments, whereas a decade later – after the humiliation of the Suez crisis, relative economic decline, and with the process of decolonisation well underway – attention turned to what a refocus on Europe (and entry to the European Economic Community) could do for Britain. This remained true for Edward Heath's 1970 Conservative government as they conducted negotiations with their European counterparts, but within a decade relations with continental Europe were no longer such a priority. However, while the significance of Europe waned, so that of the developing world gathered pace with a focus on educational partnerships, cultural exchange and an expanding palette of broadcasting initiatives. More recently, the impact of BC and WS is more likely to be discussed in terms of their ability to demonstrate soft power and an ability to engage with and utilise the global, multi-polar, social and digital communications tools of the Twenty-First Century. The perpetual reframing and nuancing of strategic priorities in this way is an

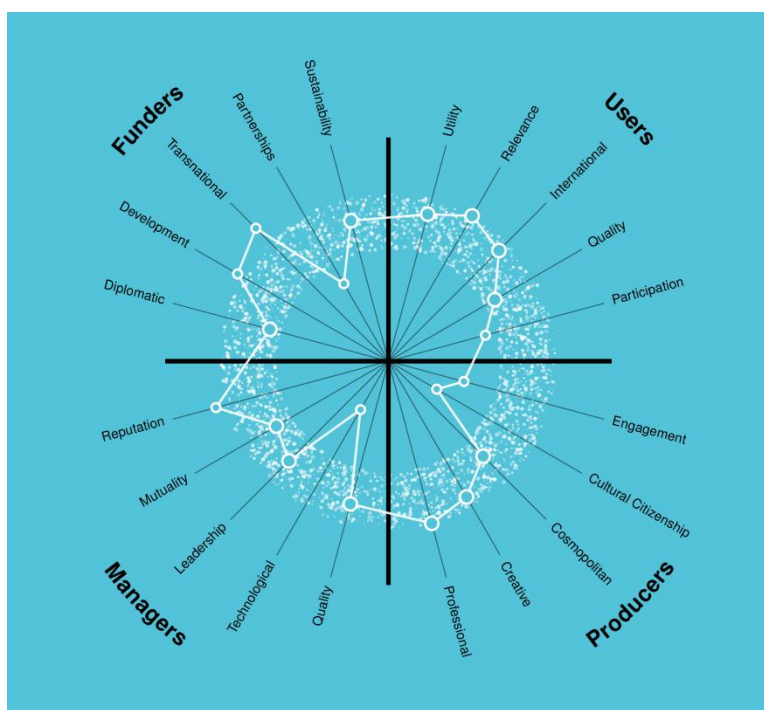
important conditioning factor in understanding the value ascribed to the British Council and BBC World Service since the 1930s. What has endured throughout those years, though, are the cultural practices and capacities of both that have kept their work relevant to audiences and users and which continues to underscore their importance in communicating the UK's national interests.

## Part II: The Cultural Value Model

We have observed that the cultural value of an organisation such as the BBC World Service (WS) or the British Council (BC) has many facets and that the term can mean many different things depending on individual and group perspective; for example, the aspects which are important for one group of an organisation’s funders may be quite different to those which matter to individuals who make use of what the organisation provides. In order to get a full and rounded picture of the cultural value of each organisation, and evaluate the success of its activities in terms of that cultural value, we must go beyond linear, reductionist performance metrics, impact indicators and the like. We propose an approach which models the different components of value, taking into account the differing perspectives of funders, users and the organisation itself, and presenting the components in a way which allows them all to be considered together in one frame. We call the process Value Analytics (VA) and the result the Cultural Value Model (CVM). The CVM can be used to evaluate specific activities in a rich, fully-contextualized way which brings together quantitative and qualitative data.

The practical application of VA to the evaluation of a specific project leads to a diagram which we call a CVM constellation. There is considerable scope for variation in the format of a constellation within the basic structure. Here our illustration is a constellation developed for the BC’s South Asia Season. The final constellation looks like this:

**Figure 1: Illustrative Cultural Value Model Constellation for the British Council.**



*(Alt Text for Figure 1: Illustrative ‘South Asia Season’ Cultural Value Model Constellation for the British Council.)*

We describe below the construction and interpretation of a constellation such as this. There are four elements to the diagram: **components** – represented as radial spokes –; **segments** – the grouping of the spokes, in this case into four quadrants –; **component scores** – shown as circles plotted on the spokes and joined with lines to form a polygon –; and the **Band of Equilibrium** – here as a torus of faint random points. The process was followed in a similar way for both BC and WS, but the outcome was different for the two organisations reflecting the differences in their nature, purpose and needs. For now we will focus on BC; later we will discuss WS process.

## Components of Value

The Value Analytics (VA) process began in October and November 2013 with workshops for staff and stakeholders. The workshops were organised around a methodology called 'Imagine', which is specifically designed to help groups, by use of easy-to-produce but abundantly educative diagrams called Rich Pictures, to come to agreement about issues and tasks which are of common interest to all group members. In the VA process Imagine was applied as a means to surface elements of value which were of importance to the culture of the organisation and to result in the CVM.

In addition to the information gleaned from the workshops our VA analysis drew on a wealth of previous research and professional experience with BC. On the basis of the information available, the team identified a set of value themes which we call **components**. Through a regular cycle of iterations involving the team and key members of BC, a unique set of components for that group and that time or 'snapshot' was devised.

Each component is defined by setting out what would represent a 'sustainable' performance by the organisation. For example, one component, labelled 'Partnerships', is described as follows:

'BC uses partnering success to further reputation and commercial capability. The BC is recognised as a good partnering organisation. It reaches a large number of people in target areas, delivers high quality outputs and actively pursues new creative partnerships that bring benefit to its customers, the UK and to the organisation'.

For BC the snapshot list contains 20 components. These components were grouped into **segments** according to different stakeholder perspectives. We began with a broad grouping of stakeholders into funders, users and the organisation itself. We then took into account an awareness that within the organisation there are different perspectives and priorities: some oriented more toward strategy, some towards users, some towards external stakeholders and some towards internal stakeholders. Hence we moved from the three-way split of funders-organisation-users to a model with four segments, labelled Funders, Users, Managers and Producers.

The full glossary of component definitions for can be found in the report and power point on our website <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/diasporas/cvp/cultural-value-framework>

Below is a brief summary:

### **Users, Publics & Customers**

**Participation:** Users are encouraged to participate actively and creatively in BC projects based on principles of mutuality, and provided with well-designed information that facilitates this participation.

**Quality:** Users find BC projects, teaching and cultural experiences enjoyable, informative, engaging. Materials and outputs are well designed, aesthetically pleasing and attractive.

**International:** The BC's cosmopolitan ethos and core values based on mutuality are demonstrated at personal and organisational level. Users develop a deeper understanding of Britain and of international affairs through interactions with the BC.

**Relevance:** The experiences that BC provides to users open up new opportunities for learning, employment, creativity, travel and enjoyment.

**Utility:** Users enjoy and learn something new from their encounters with the BC and they go on to use these skills and experiences in their everyday lives.

### **Project Leaders, Teachers & Cultural Workers**

**Professional:** Producers display a strong awareness of the BC's values based on mutuality. They demonstrate the personal and professional intercultural skills and sensitivities required to work on BC projects.

**Engagement:** Producers create content and experiences that users and audiences enjoy and engage with. They make best use of interactive technologies and social media to widen participation, and receive appropriate training to do so.

**Creative:** Producers balance creative autonomy and organisational priorities. They promote new professional, teaching, artistic and creative talent among UK and overseas publics and catalyse cultural exchange.

**Cosmopolitan:** Producers make best use of their intercultural skills. They help to promote international understanding, empathy and trust.

**Cultural citizenship:** BC producers empower their users culturally as citizens to represent themselves and to be represented, and provide resources for creative self-expression in ways which enhance the capacities of citizen.

### **Senior Managers, Strategy & Market Development**

**Reputation:** Managers protect the traditional public service ethos and the BC's brand values – trust in particular – while developing commercial partnerships in rapidly changing markets.

**Mutuality:** Managers understand the full richness of the concept of mutuality as a set of ethical principles and a practice. They value the national to global reach of the BC but recognise the need for locally sensitive and resonant work.

**Leadership:** Managers recognise and value effective leadership as perceived from within and outside. Relations between London and regional offices accords with principles of mutuality.

**Quality:** Managers oversee compliance and quality assurance. There is an effective working relationship within and between business units in quality assessment and control.

**Technological:** Managers respond to technological innovation and digital opportunities while recognising the need to sustain established best practice. The digital strategy allows for widening levels of participation in BC projects.

### Funders & Stakeholders

**Diplomatic:** BC works effectively as part of the UK's diplomatic infrastructure. BC indirectly benefits national security through the promotion of mutuality of interests via good international cultural relations.

**Development:** BC pursues Department for International Development (DfID) and other global development goals. It fosters a humanitarian ethos contributing to the alleviation of suffering and active compassion at times of environmental disaster and political conflict.

**Transnational:** BC is a key national to global institution which represents Britain and the values it cherishes and promotes – principles such as freedom of expression, the rule of law, democratic and human rights and cultural diversity.

**Partnerships:** BC uses partnering success to further its reputation and commercial capability. It reaches a large number of people in target areas, delivers high quality outputs and actively pursues new creative partnerships that bring benefit to its customers, the UK and to the organisation.

**Sustainability:** BC demonstrates financial sustainability, good financial management and consistent account management.

### Component Scores

One of the main functions of the Cultural Value Model (CVM) is evaluative (for example it is also illustrative and indicative). It has become normal for organisations to assess the performance of specific output of activities according to pre-defined criteria; these assessments may lead to key performance indicators (KPI), performance dashboards or impact indicators. With the CVM we argue that a more rounded evaluation is possible, and one aligned more clearly with the organisation's aims and objectives. For each component the actual performance can be compared against a 'sustainable' benchmark.

For an evaluation of a specific component, we use all available evidence (including quantitative data if available, views of stakeholders and outcomes of discussions) to assess its performance. This performance is then expressed as a score. To display the scores we arrange the components like spokes on a wheel diagram, arranged according to their grouping into segments. The 'population' of

the wheel is achieved by plotting the scores as points on the spokes – the higher the score, the greater the distance from the centre. The overall pattern of the scores is achieved when we join the points with lines to form a ‘constellation’.

Crucial to the interpretation of these charts is an understanding of what constitutes good performance. For this we need to introduce an important additional conceptual element of the CVM.

### **Band of Equilibrium**

The Band of Equilibrium (BoE) is the sustainability reference condition for the constellation diagrams and represents a major contribution of the CVM in organisation evaluation.

The concept supporting the BoE is that any value, indicator or metric will have a range of possible scores – represented on the diagram as a point on a component spoke. In developing the diagram, the stakeholders are asked not just to nominate and agree a range of components but also to agree the criteria for two critical scores – the lower and upper range of a sustainability band.

Where a component score is derived from quantitative metrics, the range will be defined using values of those metrics. For example, for a component reflecting audience participation in a WS broadcast, the relevant metric may be the number of people who engage with the broadcast in an average week. The stakeholders may feel that the total engagement could be as much as 40,000; they are then asked to suggest a lower and upper band score which would be ‘sustainable’. They may decide that the BoE would be represented by a number in the range of 25,000 (the lower limit) to 30,000 (the upper limit). Measured returns in this range would conform to the BoE.

Sustainability is famously hard to define and lends itself to vague and occasionally patronising or even melodramatic description (e.g. ‘the best we can do’, ‘your responsibility to yourself’ and ‘the world we hand to our kids’). A sustainable return on an indicator tends to mean that the indicator is in a form of balance and that this return can be relied upon to be repeatable again and again. It may not be ‘ideal’ or ‘excellent’ but it is good enough and, if repeatable, very much fit for purpose.

However, the BoE is not always so quantifiably produced. A component may be of a more qualitative nature (e.g. Esteem, or Reputation or Creativity) and valuation of such a component in a specific context by the relevant stakeholders needs to be achieved by means of discussion and agreement. However, the same principles hold, with performance being judged as sustainable, unsustainable by deficit or unsustainable by excess.

Once the BoE is added to the component spokes and plotted scores, the CVM constellation, as shown in Figure 1, is complete.

## **A Note on Scoring Components**

Scoring components is not necessarily a straightforward or simple process. For some components which lend themselves to existing metrics then the range of data and the current value may be relatively easy to present but, in this case, the upper and lower values of the BoE can be subject to detailed discussion and negotiation between stakeholders. On the other hand, in the case of components which have no existing data and /or are qualitative in nature, a complex process is necessary for appropriate scoring. The steps for this are that the stakeholders need to agree the:

1. title for the component (often contested)
2. definition of the component – this can usefully be used as an opportunity to define the component in the BoE, as the definition for Trust or Diplomatic or Innovation will often provide a description of the component in balance.
3. range for the component – what would the maximum and minimum values of the component register as?
4. BoE upper and lower values –these will register within the total range set out in 3 above but need to be clearly distinguished as resting within the overall range and being distinguishable.
5. current value of the component – this is the period of maximum stakeholder engagement. Often the lower total range and BoE range values are less contestable (but not always). However, the current value can be deeply contentious. Egos and senses of personal and professional worth are tied up in the assessment and different stakeholders may have markedly different perspectives of the value of a project as set out in the constellation.

These five elements provide an overview of the mechanics of scoring and the complexity tied up in it. What this reductive view misses is the learning, sharing and co-creative value of the process. In engaging in this mutual scoring process, individual's views on their project are expanded and explored. Assumptions are tested and unqualified perspectives gain in testing. This is often uncomfortable but highly valuable.

## **The Cultural Value Model for the BBC World Service**

For the BBC World Service (WS) we went through the same Value Analytics (VA) process as for the British Council (BC): Imagine workshops to surface the initial ideas for components, with the final set of components being established on the basis of all available evidence and in iterative dialogue with key people in the organisation.

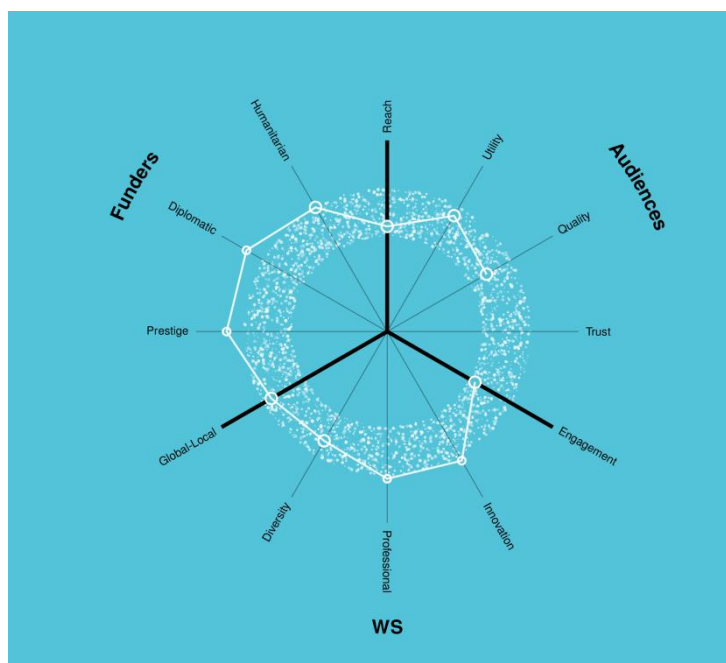
We initially used the same four-segment grouping as for BC, but for WS the separation of 'managers' and 'producers' was not seen as helpful; there was also a preference for a smaller number of components. The snapshot version consists of 12 components grouped into three segments; an additional feature is a degree of overlap between the segments, reflecting the fact that different aspects cannot necessarily be neatly allocated to one group or another: Reach is in the Funders and Audiences segments; Global-Local in Funders and WS; and Engagement is in Audiences and WS.



As with BC, constellation diagrams were developed for specific projects by using available quantitative and qualitative evidence to plot component scores against BoE.

The diagram below shows the resulting CVM for one illustrative project within WS, 100 Women.

**Figure 2: Illustrative Cultural Value Model Constellation for the BBC World Service.**



*(Alt Text for Figure 2: Illustrative Cultural Value Model Constellation for the BBC World Service – 100 Women.)*

## What Does the Constellation Tell Us?

From the Funders perspective, most of the scores are either at the upper edge of the Band of Equilibrium (BoE) or outside it. The 100 Women season showed Britain as a good place to be a woman. Some of the BBC’s most prominent and respected female reporters were in the spotlight. The Malala Yousafzai interview captured the attention of global audiences, again demonstrating the value of BBC Urdu’s original initiative to invite Malala to blog. The public diplomacy value of the 100 Women season was high. It connected audiences and ‘strategic publics’ around the world. In so doing, it brought, albeit indirectly, prestige to the UK via the BBC brand. However, opportunities were missed to hold political leaders to account in response to some revealing testimonies of women.

For audiences, scores are all within the BoE. The season covered stories about women that would not otherwise be represented. It fostered international understanding. Users participating in a Global Minds survey (BBC in-house research) found the content relevant, engaging and high quality. Yet participation among social media users was relatively low, despite some significant peaks in

traffic and social media conversations at the start and especially on the final day of the conference. Interactions on Twitter did not sustain engagement, and audience interest was not maintained at significant levels across digital platforms through the season. So we see that the scores for Reach and Engagement are both at the lower edge of the BoE. Note that there is no score plotted here for the Trust component because there was no suitable evidence available for the project under study.

For the World Service itself, scores are again within the BoE. The 100 Women season was not well resourced when compared to similar seasons; relative to resources, 100 Women performed well. It reflected strong leadership from the top and showed agile responsiveness to major global news events during 2013 involving women, violence and inequality. It mobilised a cross-platform strategy creatively and effectively and sought to offer meaningful interactive experiences for users. Some very strong, creatively inspired content included stand-out performances from some language services. So we see high scores for Professional and Innovation. However, some opportunities to achieve wider participation were missed and this contributes to the lower score for Engagement.

It is clear from this diagram that the same principles of construction are used for the models for BC and WS but that the end result is quite different in content and style.

## Cultural Value Model: Innovating Evaluation

In the course of the work on the use of the Cultural Value Model (CVM) as a tool for evaluation it has become clear that the CVM provides challenges for conventional evaluation.

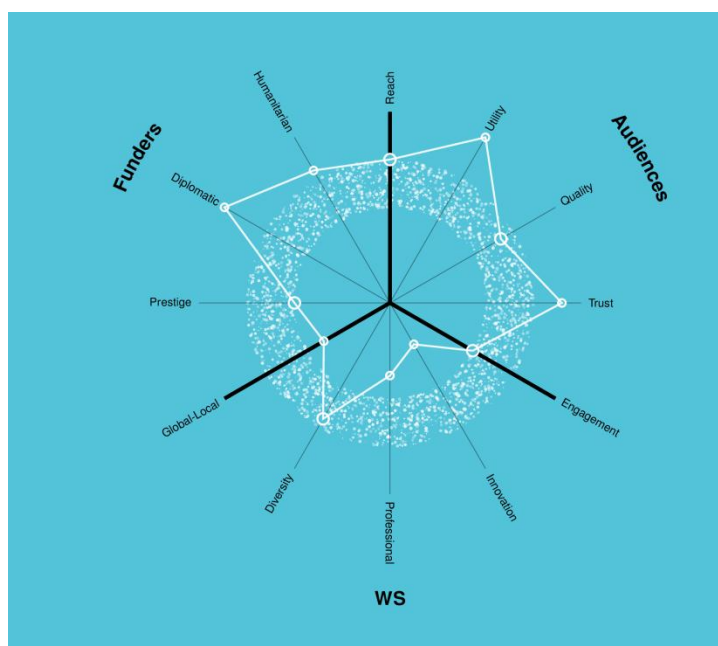
- **Data scope.** In broadening the scope of evaluation (away from top-down metrics to user-defined senses of value) we have gone beyond the areas in which data are already available.
- **Data sources.** Available data generally comes from research amongst users and addresses the components relevant to them (such as Engagement), with just a few components pertaining to other segments (such as Reach). CVM requires new forms of data collection and reporting which directly address the issues of importance to other diverse stakeholders.
- **Schedule.** CVM-based evaluation needs to begin before the start of the project or activity to be reviewed. At this stage it is possible to decide which are the key components for evaluation, the methodology for collecting evidence and the criteria for the BoE are. In this sense CVM is an integral part of a project or process and not an evaluatory add-on alien to the project or process design and roll-out.
- **Inclusion.** CVM evaluation is fundamentally a participatory process embedded within the organisation, imbued with a spirit of openness and sustainable improvement, guided by CVM experts but led by stakeholders in design, interpretation and response. This means that the CVM processes and outcomes are in part owned by those who are assessed by them.

## The Cultural Value Model as a Descriptive Tool

The CVM components, as we have said, represent the sustainable value performance of the organisation. We would not expect all the organisation’s activities, at all times, to match sustainability criteria and make use of all components. For example, WS radio programmes may in times of crisis focus on serving a humanitarian function, and at other times on professional quality; and for BC, some activities may aim to reach a large number of people whilst others reach fewer people but achieve a higher level of engagement. The CVM can be used to illustrate how specific activities deliver value at different levels for the various components.

As an example, we have looked at the output of WS during the 1956 Hungary uprising. On the basis of historical evidence we constructed the constellation shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Cultural Value Model Constellation for BBC World Service, Hungary 1956.**



*(Alt Text for Figure 3: Cultural Value Model Constellation for World Service, Hungary 1956.)*

The exceptional political circumstances meant that WS output was directed towards meeting diplomatic and humanitarian needs; that it engendered a high level of trust; but that this was at the expense of aspects such as Professionalism and Innovation. The CVM constellation is illustrative of specific values at a specific time.

## The Cultural Value Model as a Planning Tool

The in-built function of a CVM constellation to represent a systemic view of a complex whole provides the opportunity to plan with it. Such application could be at the practical level of the project itself addressing questions like: 'how can we maximise diversity?' or 'is it possible to improve Audience components without compromising Funder requirements?'; or at a more strategic level. At the strategic level constellations could be developed which represent the component values of the organisation itself and by means of the CVM it could be seen if a focus on one component criteria (e.g. Trust) results in a diminution in other component scores. Sometimes such relationships may be surprising and counter intuitive (e.g. investment in Delivery and Reach may result in a reduction in Prestige) and this may mean that strategic and policy objectives may be challenged.

## The Future of the Cultural Value Model

In this report we have set out the development path and the main outcomes of the use of the Cultural Value Model (CVM). A number of implications emerge:

- Our CVM is intended as an innovation to provoke new ways of thinking and doing assessment and responses to it by WS and BC have been predictably mixed because change is hard to instigate, and both these organisations are undergoing considerable challenges to sustain themselves at vastly reduced levels of resources. Needless to say at times of change, there is a tendency to hold on to the tried and tested ways of doing things – score cards, KPIs and impact assessment (IA) –, especially as they are thoroughly embedded in the institutional practices. However, overall, the response has been positive and this is reflected in the fact that both BC and WS are keen to continue testing it and adapting it for new projects. We can observe that the constellation diagram provides a provocative and stimulating overview of a project's value. This was our intention. If a constellation does not stimulate discussion, then its existence is questionable.
- Despite the provocative nature of the CVM, there has been encouraging interest in the interpretation of the meaning of constellations in both organisations.
- The BoE is a challenge, but responses to it have been thoughtful and reflective. To consider an assessment of value against a sustainable band remains a novel approach for the WS and BC project teams.
- The constellations are snapshots by specific people at specific times. Comparison is limited at the time of writing. The project team would be interested to develop a sequence of snapshots of one or several similar projects in order to achieve a 'movie', a longitudinal perspective of constellation change.

- The CVM will be most useful where it is embedded in the process of planning, implementation and review for a specific project. The timing of our development work has not allowed us to achieve full embedding as yet; we would like to find opportunities to implement this in suitable projects.

## Part III: Digital Cultural Value

The World Service and the British Council are supported by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office as public diplomacy partners. In moving into digital domains their activities move closer together in many ways. Yet they seldom come together to exchange knowledge on the evaluation of their activities. The project brought value to the organisations in exchanging knowledge with them, connecting their internal monitoring and evaluation processes with academic methodological reflection on evaluating the cultural value of their digital resources and activities. The first part of this section reports on the findings across our case studies on Twitter at WS and BC. The second part reports on the findings of our case study on Facebook at BC.

### 1: The Cultural Value of Twitter

Understanding the changing cultural value of the WS and BC through the lens of social media interactions is valuable because they can be tracked and analysed using new methods of 'big data' analysis. These methods have the potential to offering valuable insights into what users do with social media and the kinds of cultural experiences involved in their interactions with WS and BC (see Appendix on Social Network Analysis methods used).

Our study sought to shed light on whether social media engaged and empowered users, and widened participation at BC and WS. We wanted to know if new kinds of intercultural dialogue opened up around social media and, if so, whether it could be regarded as evidence of trust, a crucial value for both organisations.

Social media can empower us to shape our own information and news landscapes. We can select and share information or cultural experiences of particular interest or relevance. In doing so, we create networks of interconnected users. What form and shape do these networks take? What can they tell us about how users interact with WS and BC? What kinds of cultural experiences do social media offer?

Our research identified a series of factors that influence the clustering behaviour of social media users and a range of roles which an organisation can adopt to extend their influence within a socially mediated information and cultural environment.

### Overview

As users shape their own information landscapes, they cluster around the factors that are specifically important to them. These factors provide the key to unlocking the specific nature of each cluster, and the nature of the cultural and social experiences involved. These factors are fairly obvious but what is of interest is how the relative importance of each varies from one group of social media users to another.

### **The Keys:**

- Language
- Location
- Interest
- Engagement profile
- Content
- Trust

On the basis of the clustering behaviours that we analysed around the WS and BC, there are a range of roles organisations can adopt as they seek to deliver cultural value. In analysing the clustering behaviour around global news events, social media accounts fulfilling five distinct roles are regularly observed.

### **The Roles:**

- The Broadcaster
- The Bridge
- The Curator
- The Broker
- The Facilitator

Our central argument reacting to digital cultural value is that if we combine an understanding of the ways that keys that drive clusters and the range of roles open to WS and BC, it is possible to understand how cultural value is experienced. It is also possible to shape projects that combine key components of cultural value identified in our Cultural Value Model. In so doing, it would be possible for WS and BC to open up participation and enhance the richness of the cultural experiences of users. So how did we arrive at these findings?

## **World Service and British Council Go Digital**

The World Service and British Council operate in an intensely competitive and uncertain financial, geo-political, cultural and media arena. In order to survive in the digital age, they seek to engage overseas publics in participatory social media initiatives that involve trade-offs between established public service values and public diplomacy imperatives (impartiality and British national interests).

Our Cultural Value Project, sought to assess the extent to which there is now a perception in the organisations, among staff, stakeholders and users that their cultural value needs to be reconceived and re-assessed in the light of major technological change, funding cuts and organisational challenges.

Most of our case studies focussed on uses of Twitter and included the coverage of the chemical weapons attack in Syria, London 2012, the WS's 100 Women Season, and the South Asia Season run by the British Council. We also undertook an in-depth study of The British Council's Learn English

Facebook Group for Middle East and South Asia (see next section). Here we focus on uses of Twitter. Full details of the case studies and reports can be found at:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/diasporas/cvp/case-studies>

## Digital Case Studies

### #100Women

The 100 Women Season was a series of programmes, debates and discussions organised by World Service which looked at how things are changing for women across the world. It culminated in a conference at the BBC's Broadcasting House in London on October 25<sup>th</sup> 2013. As with other events of this type they tend to revolve around the organisation that originated them and as such the interactions are BBC-centric. Our study focussed on the use of the WS hash tag #100Women.

### South Asia Season

The South Asia Season produced by the British Council sought to promote opportunities to 'connect, create and collaborate' in the fields of education and culture between the UK and countries across South Asia. It comprised events and exhibitions, information about which was shared on Twitter. Similar to the 100 Women Season, interactions around the South Asia Season tended to revolve around the organisation that originated them and as such the interactions are British Council-centric.

### London Olympics 2012

The study of the London 2012 Olympics focuses on the role of Twitter in the BBC's reporting on the event, the interaction between users and corporate Twitter accounts, journalists / pundits, or athletes across a range of language services. The data for this case study (10 million tweets in 5 languages) had already been gathered. We tested a range of new social media analysis techniques.

### #Syria

#Syria focuses on the information (news) sharing network on Twitter about Syria. The data was captured through the hashtag #Syria. The study provides a comparative perspective on the news organisations which Twitter users draw and choose to share. For example, were different news organisations important to different communities of users?

## Findings

### Users shape information landscapes and create networks

Users shape their own experience of news on Twitter by selecting which accounts to engage with. But they also influence others' experience by sharing and commenting on news of particular interest or relevance, creating complex networks of closely interconnected users. This also holds true for cultural events such as 100 Women.



### **Clustering behaviour characterises the ‘Twittersphere’**

A large number of users may hold a common interest in an event, but a wide variety of factors divide this large community into smaller groupings. Users can only follow and interact with a limited number of Twitter accounts. As a result, information sharing networks on Twitter, like many other social and biological networks, divide naturally into smaller communities. These are known as clusters, sub-networks, or modules depending on the analytical perspective, and can be identified statistically using a community detection algorithm. A key issue in terms of analysing cultural value is whether these clusters represent diversity of people and plurality of opinions, and as a result the extent to which the cluster may be described as cosmopolitan. Our preliminary findings suggest that like-minded and similar demographic groups tend to cluster.

### **Language and location define user group clusters**

**Language:** WS users are predominantly multi-lingual but are particularly attracted by English as a global lingua franca. It is clear that providing news content in 27 other languages as well as English (as does the WS) enhances the reach of an organisation and the potential of engendering a ‘global conversation’. English language accounts such as @BBCNews, @BBCBreaking or @BBCSport attract bi- and tri-lingual users who also use language services such as @BBCBrasil and @BBCTurkce. Bi- and tri-lingual tweeters engage with tweets across languages, and combine languages within their tweets, thereby re-shaping the everyday language of social media around international broadcasters. The BC also capitalises on the attraction of English as a global language and this is a major source of its soft power and that of WS (Wilkinson 2013).

**Location:** Despite the potential for social media to reduce the barriers of cross-border communication, our research shows that, surprisingly, users have a similar geographic location or time zone. This applies to WS’s region/language-specific accounts but also more widely. During the London 2012 Olympics, smaller network clusters tended to share both a common language and a geographical location. For example, users posting in Spanish divided into two distinct groupings – one predominantly European and the other Latin American. This was of course a special case of sports where interest in national teams dominates. For some global news events location matters greatly, while for others there is little relationship between location of a user and the sub-network with which they chose to engage. However in instances where location is a factor, organisations can enhance their current approach by accounting for both language and location in their social media strategy.

### **Shared interests define groups**

Within a group defined by language and location, interest is the most important factor in users forming smaller sub-groups. In situations such as the coverage of the Olympics common interests, for example in a specific sport or national affiliation, are key factors in defining sub-groups within a wider language community. Through recognising this clustering behaviour, cultural and news organisations have the opportunity to target and tailor their content to the specific interests of communities.

### **World Service and British Council can act as bridges**

Given the tendency of social media users to communicate primarily with people who share their interests and point of view – the ‘echo chamber’ effect – the WS, with its significant reach into a number of distinct clusters, can act as a bridge between groups who engage with the BBC, but not with one another. This enhances the cosmopolitan value of the WS’s Twitter presence. Our analyses of the London and Sochi Olympics across a range of broadcasters provides evidence that WS enables a more plural and diverse debate than RT (Russia Today) and Al Jazeera, and connects overseas publics; fostering intercultural dialogue. We have seen multi-lingual employees playing a key role in bridging linguistic boundaries between parallel discussions about the same issue or event. For 100 Women we also saw individual journalists bridging between interest groups. However, despite these successes the big picture remains one of isolated clusters. The same is true for BC.

### **Sustaining social media conversation is difficult**

Actions such as ‘re-tweeting’ or ‘mentioning’ a specific account are taken as indications that a user is engaging with the account. We can build an ‘engagement profile’ of a specific account by looking at surges of interest, and at evidence of interaction which is more consistent over time. For example, BBC Twitter accounts such as @BBCBreaking or @BBCWorld provoke very large spikes in interest, but these dissipate quickly. By contrast, RT and some Al Jazeera accounts have profiles which show more consistent engagement; a significant number of users interact with these accounts over a sustained period, although these users still form a minority.

### **The ‘global conversation’ is one of myriad small clusters**

The notion of a ‘global conversation’ does not represent the dominant pattern of Twitter activity for WS. A relatively small proportion of users demonstrate sustained and active engagement. We noted some specific factors which discourage intercultural dialogue. For example during the Olympics collective attention was diverted away from broad public debate by a focus on sport celebrities, pundits and influencers. The way that Twitter operates privileges some users’ messages over others – Twitter allows ‘verified’ accounts (users whose identities have been declared to be authentic by Twitter) to filter replies, mentions and retweets to only include messages and notifications from other verified accounts.

The ability to recognise the specific drivers which encourage conversation and debate, and to target and tailor content appropriately, are key to maximising loyalty and encouraging users to take a more active role. WS succeeds in reaching a large number of people, but knowing and going to where interest groups cluster on Twitter, rather than waiting for them to go to the WS, could enhance engagement.

### **Matching content to user profiles enriches engagement**

Just as different engagement profiles emphasise different aspects of cultural value, so does the type of news or other content tweeted. Breaking news offers direct and immediate connection with key world events, offering utility and national/global value, whereas contextualising stories offer

enrichment and extension of public knowledge, providing the necessary background to well informed debate, and distinctiveness.

### **World Service is a trusted source on Twitter**

The BBC places a high premium on the veracity of its news, and users clearly trust WS content. This is frequently highlighted when professionals share content originating from the BBC and associated with their area of expertise. For example, Jody Day<sup>2</sup> tweeted to the BBC's Philippa Thomas<sup>3</sup> during the 100 Women season. Also, many news organisations (e.g. Al Bawaba<sup>4</sup> and De Wereld Morgen<sup>5</sup>) had hyperlinks to the BBC's content in regards to #Syria. This historically trusted role is also demonstrated when the BBC is used as a source to confirm an event. For example, the BBC was not the first organisation to report on the use of chemical weapons in Syria; however, when the BBC did report it, the surge in interest and re-sharing on Twitter was much greater than for organisations that had reported the attack earlier.

### **Trust is a two-way relationship**

Trust is a complex relationship. Users expect events that matter to them to be covered thoroughly by the news sources they trust. They also expect quality from WS and BC. Twitter is a relatively informal, personal and immediate form of communication. But being open about your personal or organisational standpoint, engaging users emotionally, and responding to events on Twitter as they happen may sometimes threaten balance, objectivity and impartiality. International news and cultural organisations are increasingly innovating on social media platforms to access new and diverse user groups. For WS the wealth of material available from external sources, including user generated content (UGC), represents an opportunity to engage with users in a way that fits well with the characteristics of Twitter, and also helps the organisation compete with other news organisations that can work with externally sourced content more freely – without the same pre-existing cultural values to protect. But this presents a dilemma: to disseminate content from a source less reliable than the BBC, or to offer a more limited, less emotionally engaging but perhaps more authoritative coverage.

### **Users have limited influence on World Service and British Council**

The habits and behaviours of users themselves will increasingly influence the value these organisations can deliver but, at present, users have limited or negligible influence on them. Lack of social media policy, resourcing and risk aversion have severely curtailed the prospects for widening participation and empowering users at WS and BC. One important area that can be increased interactions between UGC and broadcasters' content. At the moment the level of UGC which is re-tweeted, or otherwise given enhanced exposure by WS, is still low, and opportunities are not being

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<sup>2</sup> @gatewaywomen. Account description: 'Founder Gateway Women, the online friendship & support network for childless-by-circumstance women. Amazon #1 Rocking the Life Unexpected <http://ow.ly/ps80d>'.

<sup>3</sup> @PhilippaNews. Account description: 'BBC news woman. Presenter BBC World & Radio 4'.

<sup>4</sup> Albawaba.com, a media oriented on the whole Middle East.

<sup>5</sup> Dewereldmorgen.be, a Belgian news portal.

exploited to the full. There is a particular need to develop strategies which can utilise UGC in situations of international crisis where reporters are not able to be immediately responsive on the ground, something which some other news organisations do more frequently, and a strategy which enhances participation and utility without compromising journalistic standards. In Syria the use of chemical weapons was tweeted by citizens as it happened, and yet was relatively slow to be reported by WS when compared with RT. There is a complex tension between trust, reliability and responsiveness to an unfolding situation, particularly when UGC is involved, but considering ways in which UGC could be incorporated could increase the involvement of users and enhance breaking news.

### **Sharing content across social media**

One way to sustain engagement and maximise reach is to offer users a variety of ways to access content across the full range of digital platforms, offering routes between them to make the most of their particular characteristics. An organisation may have high profile Twitter accounts producing content specific to Twitter (such as @BBCBreaking), but a frequently re-tweeted and commented on URL which leads to a page on its website may have more value. For example, a high level of sharing of a BBC article about the plight of refugees in Syria was seen in our research. When we look outside WS, some organisations focus on the diversity and collective reach of *all* their content, shown in the data by a frequently shared domain. RT (previously Russia Today), and Al Jazeera did not have articles in English shared as frequently as the BBC, but did have high sharing across their range of content.

## **Strategic Implications – a Multi-Faceted Approach to Twitter**

It is clear that an account's engagement profile, and the quality of interactions associated with that account, depend on a range of factors; for example, the characteristics of the organisation that an account belongs to, the characteristics of the content of tweets, the frequency of tweets, language and so on. When compared with some of the other news organisations in our data WS appears to be risk averse in its use of Twitter, with Twitter being predominantly used as another platform for 'broadcasting' information. While many social media measurements and metrics focus on the data for individual accounts, the delivery of cultural value by an organisation using Twitter will be the result of their social media accounts collectively. Developing an effective slate of accounts depends on working with existing success and policy, and taking a holistic strategic approach.

If they wish to appear relevant to the fast changing face of media exchange, and maximise cultural value, WS needs to gain clarity and a deeper understanding of the **keys** to unlocking interaction with specific communities, and the different **roles** their social media accounts can play when interacting with these communities.

One of the keys is to work with externally sourced content. Another is to create accounts which bridge between clusters of users. To achieve this and maintain the historical values of trust and quality, then WS should look for influential external accounts operating in a specific area of social

media who may be arbiters of quality and trust for communities with which the organisations seek to engage.

In terms of roles, WS needs to offer a range of Twitter accounts with different functions in the twittersphere, rather than focussing on broadcasting content. The slate of accounts needs to systematically play to the strengths of Twitter – brevity, immediacy, informality, etc. WS already reaches a vast and diverse set of users, but only with a balancing of these roles will the quality and quantity of conversation and debate increase. This methodical approach could then be extended to other social media, and the interrelationships between them.

## Roles in the ‘Twittersphere’

With this in mind there are a number of different types of account organisations could deploy to deliver value both individually and collectively. The BBC has ‘corporate’ accounts, accounts run by individual named journalists, and accounts relating to a specific radio or TV programme. WS also already has accounts such as @BBCWHYS<sup>6</sup> and @BBCOS<sup>7</sup> which provide a model for new ways of engaging with users. They are interested in user-generated and other external content respectively, rather than focusing on promoting BBC content, but are still small in comparison to the corporate type of account.

The five distinct roles which are regularly fulfilled by social media accounts engaged in conversations about global news events are: The Broadcaster, The Bridge, The Curator, The Broker, and The Facilitator.

### **The Broadcaster:**

This role refers to the main corporate accounts (such as @BBCBreaking, @BBCNews and @BritishCouncil) which focus on producing original material and on reposting and amplifying material from other BBC accounts. The primary value of this role is in maximising reach and disseminating content that emphasises the core values of the organisation, for example, trust and reliability, while carefully managing reputation. For this, content must be tightly managed. WS focuses the majority of its effort into successfully fulfilling this role.

### **The Bridge:**

These accounts seek to reach specific groups through translation or tailoring of content to the specific tone or interest. These Bridge accounts may already have an existing relationship with a particular community, and engage specific groups not reached by the main ‘Broadcaster’ accounts. For example, in the Olympics case study the BBC language service accounts @BBCBrasil and @BBCTurkce were able to provide a bridge to users in Portuguese and Turkish. @BBCAfrica fulfilled

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<sup>6</sup> BBC World Have Your Say.

<sup>7</sup> BBC Outside Source.

a similar role during the BBC 100 Women Season. This role could equally be fulfilled by multilingual journalists or project managers.

#### **The Curator:**

These are accounts which aggregate and filter content from other sources to produce a rich and diverse stream.

A conservative approach to the role of curator draws external content into a BBC item, thus maintaining high levels of control and protection of core BBC cultural values. Examples include the journalist account @BBCRosAtkins, or the corporate accounts @BBCWHYS or @BBCOS that gather content to shape the agenda for a specific news program.

A social approach to the role of curator would be more ambitious. It would use the expertise of BBC journalists to aggregate content, embedding the BBC within a culture of 'social search' (finding news through trusted relationships and connections). These curators draw on the insight and expertise of many individuals and organisations to enrich BBC content, and also extend reach. This social approach to the curator role would need clear branding and attentive management but the rewards are high in terms of participation and engagement, and also for the journalists themselves; offering new understandings of audience, access to new sources of content for their own reporting, and opportunities to explore their creativity on Twitter.

#### **The Broker:**

Broker accounts access hard to reach groups in a similar way to Bridge accounts. The major distinction between the Bridge and Broker role is that Broker accounts are outside organisations such as the BBC, and are beyond their control. Brokers retweet content to their pre-existing networks and can be an important reach multiplier: for example, Javier Solana retweeting BBC content during the 100 Women Season. For Brokers to share content it must have a value both to the Brokers themselves and to their network. Potential Brokers could be given early warning, or be actively made aware of content which may be of interest. This approach is likely to be most effective where potential Brokers are more invested in an issue than the BBC, and where they are not 'crowded out' by the BBC acting as Broadcaster.

#### **The Facilitator:**

A Facilitator BBC account would provide access to larger audiences for non-BBC accounts that have strong content but few followers. This is a contemporary re-imagining of one of the initial functions of the BBC World Service. In the #100women season @BBCWorld re-posted content from other BBC accounts, but had it been a facilitator it would have re-tweeted content from the 100 women themselves. The 100 women will have had things to say which would be of interest to the large networks of users of @BBCWorld, @BBCNews and @BBCAfrica, and there was benefit to be gained by all parties in facilitating the connection between these users and networks. If a greater level of active empowerment of users is desired, then facilitation offers high returns for moderate investment.

## 2: The Cultural Value of the British Council's Learn English Facebook Group in Middle East and North Africa

English is, according to the British Council 'a priority for UK cultural relations in Middle East and North Africa' (British Council MENA: 1). In addition, reaching millions is one of the stated aims of British Council strategy. The British Council uses the English language as one of the key instruments of cultural relations, and 'one of the most powerful attractors to our country'.

A recent British Council report, *The English Effect* concludes that '[s]ustained investment in meeting the world's currently insatiable appetite for English is one of the best investments UK plc can make in our trading, creative and cultural future' (British Council 2013b: 15). The British Council anticipates the long-term, slow-burn, pay-off from investing in teaching English will be increased trust leading to economic growth and political influence in the form of soft power (Davidson 2013). As Martin Davidson argued, 'it is not an activity that turns itself around within a few years but rather something that is generational' (2013).

The aim of our research was to understand the value users gain from the British Council's Middle East and North Africa Learn English Facebook (BCMENALE) page. This is a flagship digital project for BC and one of its most successful Facebook pages. The case study was used to test the Cultural Value Model. Observing the behaviour of BC MENA LE page users allows us to identify opportunities to extend the cultural value of the page. To do so, we sought to understand whether the British Council could convert millions of views, and 2.4 million fans into lasting users, interactions and engagements through a social media platform such as Facebook.

We found an opportunity to develop multiple pathways of engagement, which would allow BC MENA LE to build greater involvement for the more loyal users. These pathways would allow users to travel along a continuum from becoming a fan to a greater level of engagement and cultural value.

- During the period 19 December 2013 to 13 March 2014 the page had been successful in producing an attractive product receiving over 15 million views. This level of reach relies heavily on paid sources of traffic, such as advertising and sponsored stories. On average 75% of daily traffic came from paid sources. 25% was organic (meaning users saw a post on the BC MENA LE page, or in their News Feed because they are already fans, or when it appeared in a friend's news feed because they had interacted with the BC MENA LE page). Organic traffic could be increased if MENA LE page was easier to find or to access from other British Council websites and social media. In addition, the use of striking, comic and/or appealing images can support organic reach as this encouraged users to share the content with Facebook friends. In fact the huge popularity of high quality visual images was a key point of engagement with the page.
- The Facebook page has successfully converted the high numbers of initial users (reach) into fans of the page. Currently there are 2.4 million fans, more than any other British Council Facebook page. In seeking greater cultural value, in terms of reach, interaction and engagement, increasing this conversion rate from reach to initial interactions could be a focus for the future development of the page. To drive greater conversion, we suggest the



use of quirky and amusing visual images and multiple choice questions because we found these were associated with high numbers of ‘comments’, ‘likes’ and ‘shares’. We observed that ‘popular’ posts tend to combine being entertaining and requiring little effort to answer, for example multiple choice rather than questions requiring writing a longer response. This may be an opportunity for collaboration with other departments within the British Council, such as Arts, that have access to a greater range of imagery and create an opportunity for departments to develop cultural value collectively.

- There has been great success in increasing the number of page likes to 2.4 million. Social Bakers ranks BC MENA LE ahead of Cambridge English, Australia Plus Learn English, Open English and ELS Educational Services Inc in terms of Facebook fans. However, maintaining interest is a challenge for the BC MENA LE page, just fewer than 130,000 users have ever commented on a post. Of these users 54% comment only once and 86% comment five or fewer times. Similarly, the survey of BC MENA LE users found 67.5% of respondents had been a fan of the page for less than six months while 12.3% had been a fan for a year.<sup>8</sup> As a result, BC MENA LE has to continually engage new users to maintain the same level of comments. Finding ways to retain users would demonstrate greater sustainability and longer term engagement. Data archived directly from the page showed that users who engage with posts on the Facebook page fall into two groups of particularly engaged users: one group that ‘comments’ frequently and one that ‘likes’ posts frequently. Only a minority appear to do both frequently. Finding ways to increase comments from those who already ‘like’ posts could increase longer term engagement as a driver of cultural value.
- The page has demonstrated that it is attracting users at different stages of learning English. The page can achieve even greater cultural value if there is differentiation between the tasks for different types of user and the experience they are seeking. As might be expected, those at an early stage in their English language learning respond to the less demanding posts. Where posts demand more of their users, the users that respond tend to do so more thoroughly and in better English, but there tends to be fewer ‘comments’. Creating a clear differentiation between different levels of advancement in questions may help provide a sense of progression, maintaining the interest of users and help users find posts they are most likely to be engaged by. In addition, the data provides evidence that it is possible to combine learning English and sharing other UK cultural assets, as shown by the relative popularity of the post about the ‘GREAT’ campaign when compared to the number of times it was viewed (for details see full report for details at: <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/diasporas/cvp/case-studies>).
- Differentiating early stage and more experienced learners also creates the potential to develop a community of more experienced learners that could support each other’s learning. In such cases, users respond with genuine ‘comments’ rather than just the answer to a question and they elicit a degree of conversation or discussion with other users. Making

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<sup>8</sup> Survey data provided by the British Council.



better use of more experienced users would shift the relationship away from a hub and spoke model (where users engage predominantly with the British Council) to one where the community engages with each other. By shifting the relationship, the page could facilitate international connections between users. This would allow the British Council to add greater cultural value to the language learning, for example, by promoting internationalism in addition to delivering greater levels of social engagement in language learning. The introduction of a peer-assisted learning approach would need careful explanation but equally can have significant benefit for learners (See, for example, Green 2011).

- The greater engagement and increased cultural value derived by developing a greater sense of community could have other advantages including fostering a greater sense of trust and loyalty.
- The role of the English Doctor offers a valuable contribution to the page in terms of English learning, but perhaps more importantly in setting a warm and welcoming tone which may be the key to the success of the page. However, there is a clear limitation of the current format of the English Doctor, it is humanly impossible to answer all the questions if the page becomes more successful. We identify two potential avenues. First, as the same questions are asked frequently, an FAQ section of the most common questions might help reduce repetition. Second, if there are differentiated groups of users, the answers to some basic questions could be crowdsourced from more experienced learners, for example from the teachers who identified sharing content on BC MENA LE with their students.

## Conclusion

This report has presented the background to the Cultural Value Model. Our historical research on the World Service and the British Council provided the context to understanding these organisations. Our digital case studies were used to test and develop the Cultural Value Model (CVM). Our CVM points to the contemporary importance of mobilising diverse forms of evidential value in assessment processes in international organisations. Evidential value, demonstrated in the visual format of a constellation provides a transferrable and readily accessible means to understand, assess and develop cultural production of all kinds. We continue to test our model and refine it in collaboration with World Service and British Council.

This was a short research project and, although we achieved a great deal, remains a work-in-progress (October 2013-May 2014). The report has only touched on the key findings and we recommend that the reader consult our project website to gain a clear picture of the breadth and depth of research despite its short time frame:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/diasporas/cvp>

We fulfilled our main objectives to create a better understanding of the changing cultural value of the BBC World Service and British Council including:

1. We connected, in a dynamic way, two components of the call for bids: i) experiences of arts and culture in fostering 'reflective individuals and engaged citizens' via these institutions; and ii) 'understanding cultural value in an international setting'.
2. We delivered a robust analytical and methodological framework for understanding, evidencing and analysing the changing cultural value of the BBC World Service (WS) and the British Council (BC) and their contribution to fostering reflective individuals and engaged citizens.
3. We captured how the cultural value of the WS and the BC has been imagined and demonstrated by the organisations in the past, by their key stakeholders and particularly by audiences/users, drawing selectively on an extensive archive of prior AHRC funded research on the WS led by Gillespie (<http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/diasporas/>), as well as substantial prior research with the BC led by Bell.
4. We found, via our Imagine Workshops, that there is a strong perception in the organisations, among staff, stakeholders and users that the value of WS and BC needs to be reconceived and re-assessed in the light of major technological change, funding cuts and organisational challenges.
5. With our partners, via our workshops and events, we examined the robustness of the methodological designs, forms of evidence and modes of evaluation used in the past and currently, identified good research practice, and suggested alternative, unforeseen, possibilities for methodological innovation in future research.

6. We used social media as an analytical prism and as a methodological tool to analyse the changing cultural value of the organisation for individuals and society.
7. Via our case studies of digital projects, we created and tested our Cultural Value Model and other innovative methodological designs for evidencing and evaluating the difference that the digital make to the WS and BC's capacity to foster and sustain trust. We found that the nature of trust is changing as a result of digital experiences and must be reconceived as a much more dialogic process.
8. Digital cultural experiences generated by the WS and BC shape perceptions of Britain and of British values and in so doing produce a specifically national cultural value which brings benefits to Britain and British citizens.
9. Digital cultural experiences do not as yet provide users with significantly enlarged or enriched experiences, a deeper engagement with and/or a greater understanding of citizens in other parts of the world. Barriers to participation and empowerment in the digital sphere remain strong especially bearing in mind the fact the the majority of social media users are well educated males in the 18-35 year group.
10. Cultural experiences enabled by digital media can forge aspirations and practices which might be described as cosmopolitan and/or as producing cosmopolitan cultural value.
11. Intersecting aesthetic, political, ethical and social experiences are articulated in social media discussions and qualitative analyses of such digital traces ('big data' resources) can be combined with 'thick ethnographic' description to promote new ways of understanding and evidencing cultural value.
12. The multi-sensorial dimensions and potential, specifically of visual media, to travel and translate across cultural boundaries, eliciting more or less powerful experiences and responses can assist in providing resources for enhanced reflectiveness, participatory citizenship and civil activism.

## **Appendix A. Research Methodology and Methodological Advances: Cultural Value Constellations**

In our proposal we posed three questions regarding methodological innovation:

- i. How adequate to the task of understanding cultural value in an international context are the methods, forms of evidence and modes of evaluation currently used by the WS and BC?
- ii. What are the best approaches to analysing the complex entanglements of competing logics (strategic and economic, policy-driven/instrumental versus aesthetic and cultural; societal versus individual; national versus international) in assessing their value?
- iii. How might existing methods be mixed, used and/or improved to achieve culturally sensitive understandings of cultural value, appropriate for such organisations in a digital age?

In this Appendix we address these questions about existing methods, best means to analyse complex issues and how to adapt existing approaches to improve understanding of cultural value and we outline the details of our methodological response.

Our methodological design combined archival ethnographic methods. Our digital research used social network analysis. The methodology which provided the basis for and informed the construction of the Cultural Value Model (CVM) is known as Imagine (Bell 2011). Imagine is a set of participatory methods, developed over the last couple of decades, aimed at imagining and enacting organisational innovation with a focus on the sustainability of good practice. Building on this, Imagine is a means to explore sustainability in short, medium and long term by means of diagrammatic composite indicators (Bell, Correa Pena and Prem 2013; Bell and Morse 2008). This toolkit of methods comes out of the Discipline of Systems Theory and in particular Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland and Scholes 1990) and formed the basis of our explorations of how the BBC World Service (WS) and British Council (BC) conceived of and assessed cultural value (CV) and provided the fundamental grounding for the resulting CVM.

The next three sections deal with the three questions in sequence.

### **Adequacy of Existing Methods at the WS and the BC**

Both the WS and the BC are organisations which make full and comprehensive use of metrics for the assessment of performance and impact. This was clear from the preliminary Imagine workshops. Key performance indicators (KPI) and resulting impact assessment (IA) both tend to be metrics-based – quantitative models which retain a largely numeric form of presentation. One of our contentions is that numeric data often represents a hostile barrier to deeper and wider understanding, especially in the field of culture.

Within the WS and the BC we found a highly instrumentalist focus on KPIs and IA, and a predictable lack of clarity about value and, especially at the WS, an antipathy to the very notion of cultural value as too vague to be useful or measurable. And yet the existing systems of self-assessment invariably imposed upon the organisations notions of value as understood by management consultants for whom number crunching metrics are the key to unlocking impact – numerous examples exist but Tanner provides one interesting IA model (Tanner 2012). Such metrics tend to zone in on concerns regarding value for money, reach, impact and user satisfaction – the latter usually assessed by the ubiquitous sample survey. A KPI, IA mindset tends to be linear and cause-effect orientated. By contrast, the premise of our CVM is that it is a multi-dimensional concept that cannot be represented by one number or statement. Existing methods in both organisations are superb at assessing simple, cause and effect, linear relations. They are of necessity less capable at addressing complex and systemic, subjective assessments of value.

## **What Are the Best Approaches to Understanding Cultural Value?**

Metrics pose challenges to those seeking to gain a clear sense of change in the diverse components of cultural value in dynamic organisational processes.

Part of the intention behind our project was the ambition to communicate, rapidly and usefully in visual form, diverse data sets (often based on numeric sources but also on qualitative data sources) about perceptions of culture value. Steele and Iliinsky (2010) have argued that human beings are very good at interpreting visual data:

‘... our visual system is extremely well built for visual analysis. There’s a huge amount of data coming into your brain through your eyes; the optic nerve is a very big pipe, and it sends data to your brain very quickly (one study estimates the transmission speed of the optic nerve at around 9Mb/sec). Once that data arrives at the brain, it’s rapidly processed by sophisticated software that’s extremely good at tasks such as edge detection, shape recognition, and pattern matching’ <http://blog.visual.ly/why-is-data-visualization-so-hot/>

The human capacity for interpreting information in visual formats relates to the desire to seek and find patterns. Diagrammatic structures can be used for a surprising number of purposes. For example they can be analogue (looking similar to a real thing), schematic (looking like the plan of a real thing) or conceptual (looking like a relationship perspective on real things) (Open University 2000).

The concept of the visual display of any form of data in order to enhance understanding found its high ground in the work of Edward Tufte (although the field was led much earlier by mathematicians like William Playfair (1759 - 1823)). Tufte, in his landmark 1983 book *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* explained: ‘of all methods for analysing and communicating statistical information, well-designed data graphics are usually the simplest and at the same time the most powerful’ (Tufte 1983: 9). Tufte understood the value of the graphic as an explanatory device and others have developed a vast range of visual devices to present numbers in ways which convey

powerful and complex meanings. One such device is the radar, kite or AMOEBA diagram developed to express ecological issues. Ten Brink (Ten Brink, Hosper and Collin 1991) working in the complex and systemic field of environmental ecology produced the AMOEBA diagram as a means to capture data in a radial form. He made a great communicative advance:

‘The AMOEBA-approach is simple and easily visualized. We expect it to make the problems of ecological decline more accessible for water authorities and the public alike. Therefore it can function as a vehicle of communication between policymakers and scientists and publics. A better understanding of the ecological objectives, the problem areas and the measures which have to be taken will increase the collective will to act.’ (1991: 270).

In our innovation on the AMOEBA which we refer to as the constellation we provide a means to utilise the natural pattern recognition of the human brain as a means to interpret data and represent in analogue, schematic or conceptual ways. Further, the diagram catalyses discussions, enhances shared understanding and provides the evidence for subsequent collective action – essentially it is a collaborative process of construction and interpretation that aids decision making. The constellation diagram provides a visual means to present and understand how the different components of cultural value are scored using qualitative and/or quantitative data.

## **How Methods Might be Adapted to Provide a Means to Assess Cultural Value**

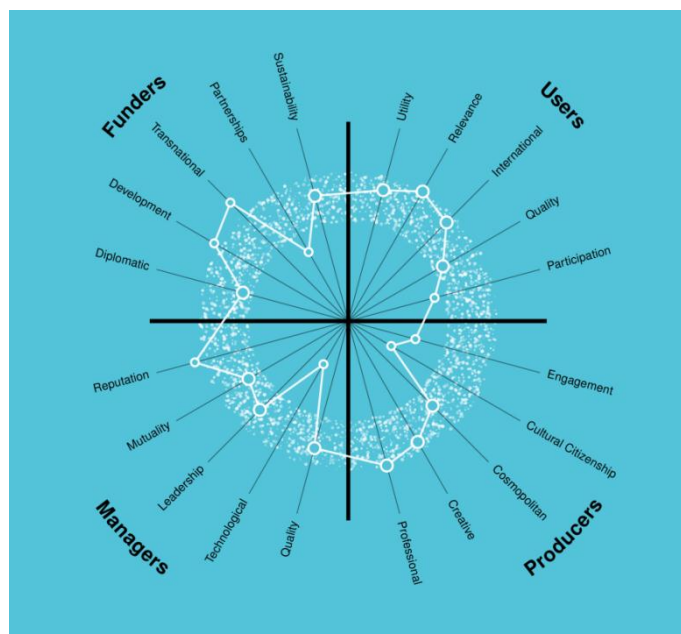
Taking into account the organisational cultures of the British Council (BC) and the BBC World Service (WS), the research team sought organisation on the different components of cultural value and how they would be measured and assessed. We use the term stakeholder here to reflect its usage within the WS and BC, and to underscore the fact that different people in the organisation have different stakes in different components of value (soft power versus utility value, for example). We worked with members of each organisation to devise a suitable set of components of CV which could be assessed in a rounded and systemic manner using a variety of data sources – quantitative and qualitative. It was important that the Cultural Value Model (CVM) would be capable of assessing the different components of value of WS and BC activities, outputs and events from the competing and often confliction perspectives of the various stakeholders inside and outside the organisations. Our Imagine workshops facilitated this process and involved 35-45 members of WS and BC respectively to ensure a wide cross-section of staff and senior manager as well as more junior post.

Having gained rich insights into how different stakeholders imagined components of value via the preliminary workshops, we supplemented this new data with our assessments drawn from a decade of research and consultancy experience of the two organisations. Key to our thinking was to produce a Cultural Value Model which was generic enough to be of use to the two organisations but flexible enough to be adjustable to specific projects or sub groups within each organisation. The key themes of our CVM are as follows:

- It should be derived from an assessment of particular components of CV.

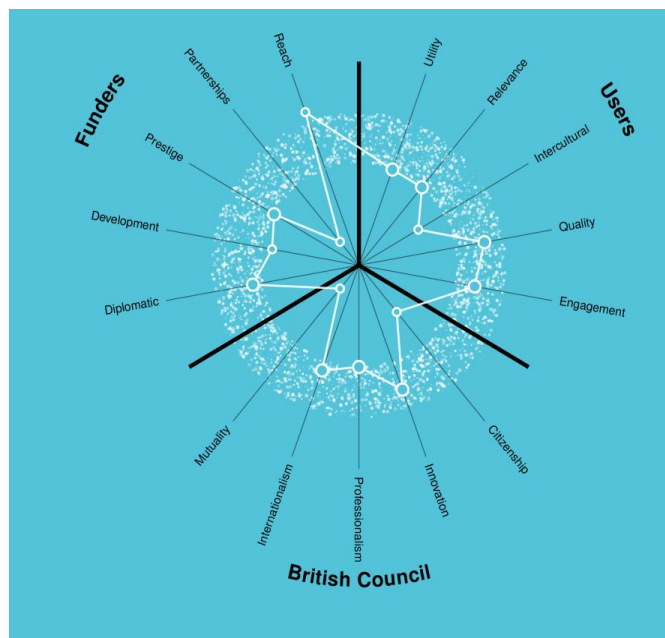
- The collective assessment and scoring of the core components of CV should include a range of indicators, some of which are well understood and have meaning to stakeholders and some which are aspirational.
- A Band of Equilibrium (BoE) should be agreed in advance of scoring in order to trigger debate about which aspects of CV would be sustainable - the CVM should provide a benchmark of sustainable value presented by what we describe in the main report as a Band of Equilibrium or BoE. The BoE is of interest to the network of stakeholders.
- Presenting the CVM ‘snapshot’ – an illustrative diagram type a constellation of CV. The constellation is representative of a range of measures of value.
- The resulting constellation diagram is a ‘composite indicator’ –a diagram where all the components of value are scored and form a constellation –, a composite visualisation of the whole. Two examples are shown here. The diagrams represent the key features of the CVM:
- There are three or four segments representing the stakeholder network: - Funders, Users and Public and British Council (in this case).
- Each segment contains a number of components of value - these are represented here as ‘spokes’ such as Professional, Quality, Reach, etc.
- Each assessed component is ‘scored’ on the diagram by a ‘point’.
- The BoE is represented as a donut shaped band with most scores inside it and sustainable.

**Figure 4: Constellation diagram for the British Council’s ‘South Asian Season’.**



*(Alt Text for Figure 4: Illustrative Cultural Value Model Constellation for British Council.)*

**Figure 5: Constellation diagram for the British Council’s Learn English MENA.**



*(Alt Text for Figure 5: Illustrative Learn English MENA Cultural Value Model Constellation for British Council)*

Below we outline some general points which can be made about the CVM.

- Existing measurement approaches in use and embedded by practice in both organisations tend to be linear and performance/impact views of activity. They tend to be top down and non-participatory.
- This non-participatory mindset is not always open to more inclusive (and therefore more engaging and time consuming) methods such as the CVM.
- Cultural value dynamic is best understood as a non-linear and unclear-cause-and-effect attribute of activities.
- Diagrams are good means to capture and translate complex meaning.
- The CVM constellation provides a sense of what is sustainable in value terms across a range of assessments of value for different stakeholders in the network context.
- The constellation provides a sense of the whole from multiple perspectives.
- This is a snapshot. In many circumstances it would be possible to produce a constellation on a regular basis thus enabling a sense of progress, change and tendency – a constellation movie.
- This constellation is largely generic, but the aim is to hand it over to groups within the WS and the BC and to facilitate them in developing their own.
- It is the stakeholder-driven, context specific version of the CVM which we suggest will find greatest traction in use.



## Appendix B. Research Methodology and Methodological Advances: Social Media Network Analysis

This section presents the rationale and methodology for using network analysis to assess cultural value and proposes a novel approach to identifying key actors in a network.

We live in a world of networks shaped by diverse social groups, relationships and interactions including kinship, friendship, neighbourhood, work, online and social media networks. As Steve Borgatti has argued, 'one of the most potent ideas in the social sciences is the notion that individuals are embedded in thick webs of social relations and interactions' (Borgatti et al. 2009: 892). Understanding the nature of the networks within which organisations like the BBC World Service (WS) and the British Council (BC) operate provides important insights into the ways information flows through these networks, how influence and engagement can be mapped and measured, and the cultural power and value which results from these communication and information networks. In this study we present a novel method of identifying key actors in a network. As individuals are influential in different ways, this approach to key actor analysis identifies the different roles individuals play in a group or network.

Network analysis is a distinctive research approach within the social and behavioural sciences. It focuses on the importance of the relationships between interacting units (Wasserman and Faust 1994: 4). Networks depend on historical as well as social context, and studies range from the family ties in Renaissance Florence, (Padgett 1994) to connections in covert terrorist networks (Krebs 2002), to calls and between mobile phones in Côte d'Ivoire, (Global Pulse 2013).

Relationships influence the transmission of disease, the diffusion of innovation, and the dissemination of ideas and information. (Christakis and Fowler 2007; Erikson 2013; Gainforth et al. 2014). Relationships also influence the ways in which an individual accesses social support and social capital (Wellman et al. 2001; Luke and Harris 2007). One area of increasing interest for social science is the impact of social media on the production and dissemination of news and information (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Newman et al. 2012; Xu. 2014). Research has examined the role of social media in political change (Shirky 2011), in sharing information about elections (Mäkinen 2008; Metzgar et al. 2009), and even attempts to forecast large-scale human behaviour (Leetaru 2011).

### Constructing a Graph

The start point for network analysis is a representation of the relationships between the members of a specific network in what is known as a network graph. In each case the relationship is represented by a line, known as an edge or arc, connecting the two 'interacting units'. 'Interacting units' are known as nodes in a network graph. As data is added, the network grows from one connection between two points (known as a dyad) into a large-scale network representation. These

can be small networks or the 69 billion friendship links between 721 million Facebook users (Backstrom et al. 2012) or the 61.6 million vertices and 1.47 billion edges from a study of Twitter (Ediger 2010).

To create a representation of the information sharing network on Twitter, an 'edge' is created for each user that retweeted or mentioned another user. Using this technique researchers have previously found that there was a 'pattern in social media toward clustering into insular like-minded communities' and concluded that these clusters were 'unmistakable' (Marc Lynch et al. 2014: 3). This clustering behaviour has profound implications for researching the dissemination and interpretation of news on Twitter, and for assumptions about the potential of social media for opening participation in a global public sphere of debate. Constructing a network graph enables us to see who is interacting with whom, whether clusters exist in the network, what the nature of those clusters is, and what this network mapping reveals about how, for example, users interact with World Service or British Council.

In the social network graphs built for this study, the 'interacting units' are Twitter users and the 'relationships' represent users who tweeted to other users. This might involve interactions among twitter users or between twitter uses and the WS or BC in response to corporate outputs, accounts and/or communications. Each interaction is represented on the resulting graph as a line between the node which represents the user that created the original tweet and the node representing the user that retweeted that content. Each node represents one Twitter account (or Twitter user). Each edge ( $\rightarrow$ ) represents a tweet which goes from one user to another. We say 'A's tweet goes to B' or 'A tweeted to B' ( $A \rightarrow B$ ) if one of the three cases occurred:

- User A **replied** to a post of user B (using Twitter 'Reply' functionality);
- User A **retweeted** a post of user B (i.e. user A posted a copy of user B's post which indicated that B was the original author);
- User A **mentioned** user B in their post using Twitter's conventional symbol '@'.

To build the network representation, an edgelist was created of all the edges identified in the data. Most elements of the network visualization and analysis were conducted using Gephi, with additional analysis conducted using igraph in R and Networkx in Python, to check the calculations of network metrics. In the resulting visualization, the thicker the edge from A to B is, the more times A tweeted to B (most of the edges are thin and represent only one tweet).

## Network Metrics

Within network analysis, one group of these metrics are measures of 'centrality'. Each centrality measure provides a different perspective on how important (central) a node is within a specific network. There are a wide range of options for calculating centrality (Valente et al. 2008) but our study used three, Degree, Betweenness and PageRank to analyse the networks. This allows us to assess cultural value in terms of the influence of specific accounts within a wider social network.

**Degree:**

Degree centrality is, in simple form, the number of relationships which connect to a specific node. For example, if I had five friends and drew a network graph which represented these friendships, the node representing me would have a degree centrality of 5. For WS and BC the figure will of course be higher. In formal terms, the degree of a node is the number of lines that are incident with it (Wasserman and Faust 1994: 100)

**Betweenness:**

Betweenness centrality refers to how often a node lies on the shortest path between any two nodes in the network. Actors ranked highly on betweenness centrality, therefore, have the potential to influence others near them in a network (Friedkin 1991), seemingly through both direct and indirect pathways. A node with high betweenness centrality can potentially influence the spread of information through the network, by facilitating, hindering, or even altering the communication between others (Freeman 1979; Newman 2003). This is important for understanding how influence flows.

Thus, betweenness centrality focuses on nodes that are both retweeted/mentioned by others *and* retweeted, mentioned by someone else themselves. High betweenness often indicates a unique or nearly unique position bridging between one group of users and the rest of the network as all the shortest paths have to pass through that single user. This helps us understand bridge figures in networks that are influential in shaping flows of communication and information. Such figures have cultural value within the network.

**PageRank:**

PageRank is a complex calculation of a probability distribution for nodes in a network. It calculates how likely a user is to reach a specific node from other nodes in a network. The full explanation for PageRank was presented in a paper 'The Anatomy of a Large-Scale Hypertextual Web Search Engine' (Brin and Page 1998). This paper set out the design of a system that revolutionised the process of delivering web search results – Google.

A short hand way of thinking about PageRank is that the PageRank of 'node A' is influenced by the degree centrality of 'node A' in conjunction with the degree centrality of the nodes which connect to 'node A'.

The reason PageRank takes both these elements into account is that it uses the idea of a 'random surfer' finding their way across the internet by clicking a link on a web page, landing on the next web page and clicking a link which takes them to a third page and so on. Using the concept of the random surfer Sergey Brin and Larry Page (the 'Page' in PageRank) applied the concept of the random surfer to web search through the 'intuitive justification' that web pages 'that are well cited from many places around the Web are worth looking at. Also, pages that have perhaps only one citation from something like the Yahoo! homepage are also generally worth looking at'(Brin and Page 1998).

In our case, this logic could be restated as this: people who are retweeted a lot are worth looking at, as are people who were retweeted infrequently – but when they are, it is by well-known account –

perhaps a BBC Twitter account, or @BarakObama for example. We were able to use this measure to see who in WS or BC are being retweeted and gain further insights into flows of information, patterns of influence, and cultural value in the Twittersphere around BC and WS.

Calculating PageRank requires the researcher to define the 'damping factor', how likely the 'random surfer' imagined by Brin and Page is to jump from browsing one interconnected set of pages to begin browsing another set of interconnected pages. For our use of PageRank, the damping factor was set at (0.85 / 15%). This damping factor was selected as it was the level suggested in Brin and Page (1998) and also highlighted by Becchetti and Castillo (2006) who observed in their analysis of PageRank that the 'typical damping factor used in practice is between 0.85 and 0.90'. This allows one to set parameters of probability in likely behaviour and measure actual behaviour against these norms – enabling a more accurate picture to emerge.

### **Modularity:**

In addition to the centrality measures, we used modularity to identify interconnected clusters within the network. Modularity is a form of statistical analysis of the network representation which measures how well a network can be decomposed into smaller sub-networks or 'modular communities' (Blondel et al. 2008). This highlights the smaller communities which are interconnected to a greater extent than they connect to the rest of the network. Our use of this technique was quite revealing, as it showed that the WS's ambitions to generate a 'global conversation' (conversations shared by a global network of contributors and participants), were cut by the fact that we identified myriad small clusters of tweeters having distinctive conversations, suggesting a more fragmented picture than the one intimated by global conversation.

## **Key Actor Analysis**

Identifying influential members of a network has been a focus of research for as long as researchers have been conducting network analysis. Many different approaches have been suggested (Wilson 2009; Tayebi 2011; Hsu et al. 2013). In this study we present a novel method of identifying key actors in a network. As individuals are influential in different ways, this approach to key actor analysis identifies the different roles individuals play in a group or network.

This approach builds on a method suggested by Drew Conway (2009) which in turn draws on the work examining the correlation between network metrics by Thomas Valente et al. (2008). The initial suggestion by Drew Conway plotted betweenness and eigenvector metrics for each node in the network to differentiate those users that are important to the core of the network from those users that are important bridges sharing information to a wider audience. We used PageRank rather than eigenvector, as the PageRank algorithm combined the eigenvector calculation with a 'damping factor' which ensures the algorithm runs the calculation on disconnected elements of the network.

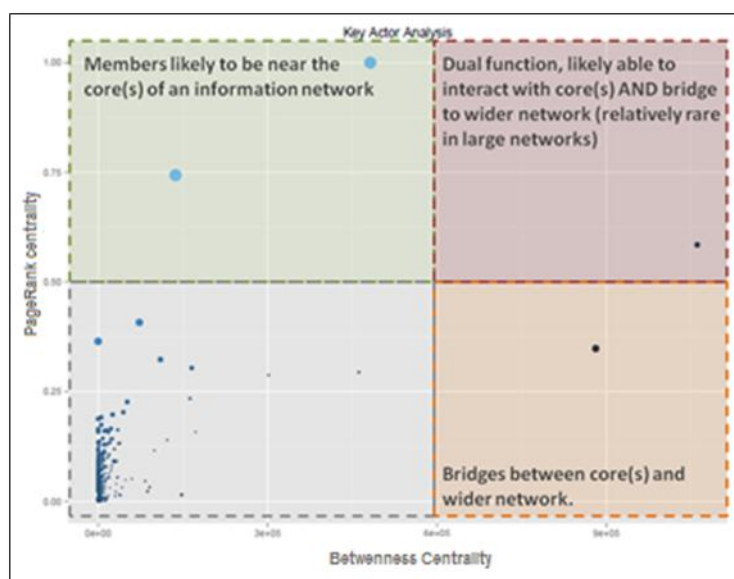
## Method

To identify key actors we used a process of plotting two network metrics – Betweenness and PageRank – against each other. Betweenness represents how important a user is in facilitating the flow of information to specific parts of the network. Individuals fulfilling this role are often known as ‘bridges’ or ‘gatekeepers’ and are valuable as they select and tailor information to users in a specific part of the network.

Those with a high PageRank score are key members of the network because other important network members interact with them. These users are heavily invested in the activity of that network, and are usually recognised as important actors by other members.

The diagram below helps us understand how the scatterplot of key network actors can be used to identify nodes which fulfill different roles in the network:

**Figure 6: Key Actor Analysis Example Diagram.**



*(Alt Text for Figure 6: This figure illustrates how Key Actor Analysis Diagrams are structured on an example dataset.)*

This figure illustrates how Key Actor Analysis Diagrams are structured on an example dataset. This is a scatterplot diagram. Each node on the diagram represents one Twitter account in the #100women network. The nodes are positioned in alignment with two axes. The horizontal axis represents their Betweenness centrality (i.e. ability to bridge communities of the network). The vertical axis represents their PageRank centrality (i.e. their relative importance in the network). The diagram is loosely partitioned into to four quadrants which represent three types of key actors (in top-left, bottom-right and top-right) and a quadrant of non-key actors (bottom left.)

- Users in the bottom left quadrant tend to have no particular role and can be thought of as general users.
- Those in the top left, with high PageRank but low betweenness, tend to be in the core (or one of the cores) of the network. This indicates they are often those most involved and are likely to provide value by providing access to privileged information. They are likely to be driving discussion and valued as trusted sources of information which others share.
- Those in the bottom right quadrant, with high betweenness but low PageRank, fulfil the role of bridging between the core content producers and a specific community (or 'audience'). The value of this role often comes from tailoring information and as such these users are most valuable to a specific group, but less important to everyone else. They often also share content from other sources in addition to their own content.
- Users in the top right, scoring highly on both metrics, are rare. They have a dual function, as they have the same trusted status as those in the top left quadrant. They also fulfill the same 'bridge' role as users in the bottom right quadrant, reaching areas of the network which others do not.

This novel approach to comparing network metrics by plotting them against one another allowed to understand whether different types of account fulfilled different roles within the network. For a detailed account: <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/diasporas/cvp/case-studies>

## The Research Team

### Principal Investigator

Marie Gillespie – *Professor of Sociology, The Open University*

### Co-Investigators

Simon Bell – *Co-ordinator, Methodology; Professor of Innovation and Methodology, The Open University*

Dr Alban Webb – *Co-ordinator, Historical Strand; Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change, The Open University*

Dr Ali Fisher – *Co-ordinator, Digital Strand; Consultant Researcher*

Colin Wilding – *Worked on all Strands; Consultant Researcher; Specialist on International Broadcasting, formerly Senior Audience Researcher at BBC World Service*

### Researchers

Tot Foster – *Digital Strand; Consultant Researcher*

Dalal Jebril – *Digital Strand; Consultant Researcher*

Iliia Lvov – *Digital Strand; Computer Science, St Andrews*

Nat Martin – *Historical Strand; Human Sciences, New College, Oxford*

Jessica Macfarlane – *Historical Strand; Consultant Researcher, formerly Head of Governance and Stakeholder Liaison at BBC World Service*

Waheed Mirza – *Digital Strand; novelist, formerly BBC World Service broadcaster*

Dr Andrew W M Smith – *Historical Strand; History, UCL*

Dr Alex Voss – *Digital Strand; Computer Science, St Andrews*

## References and External Links

### External links

Our cultural value website can be found at:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/diasporas/cvp>

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