Abstract
GetUp! began in 2005. It is an Australian grass-roots community advocacy organisation that aims to build an accountable and progressive Australian Parliament, and for this reason it does not support any particular political party (‘About GetUp! — FAQ (GetUp!)’, n.d.). GetUp.org.au claims it is ‘an independent political movement to build a progressive Australia’ bringing ‘like-minded people’ together ‘who want to bring participation back into our democracy’. GetUp!’s website is core to the network governance of the group. GetUp members number 350,000 (about 5% of the population). Members are asked to forward the emails they receive from GetUp! to ‘five friends’ and, according to GetUp!, through this act messages can reach millions (28 April 2010). Thus GetUp! conducts viral snowball campaigns to create a groundswell of action through: 1) bite-size emails which inform members of the latest issue that needs political action; 2) promotional videos on YouTube; 3) advertisements in national newspapers and on national television; 4) and the development of political campaign skills through Community Organizing Workshops based on ‘Camp Obama’. So GetUp!’s aim is independent media activism mainly activated through the communicative space of the Internet. The purpose of this paper is to analyse a sample of GetUp!’s videos that are used as visual media tools to engage members and the wider citizenry. The author concludes that GetUp!’s YouTube videos are potent and effective as tactics to gain access to the ‘symbolic power’ of the mainstream media (Couldry 2002) and at the same time retain control over production of their campaign messages. Tactics include production of visual media to be used as an ‘information source’ (Grabe & Bucy 2009, p. 26), and viral communication which is effective in creating a ‘media buzz’ (Castells 2009, p. 334).

Introduction
GetUp!’s campaigns are community based and their website is the core to the network governance of the group. Much of the work done by GetUp! is to produce tools that members can to use to advocate about specific issues.1 GetUp! uses its tools to create a groundswell of action through: 1) bite-size emails which inform members of the latest issue that needs political action; 2) promotional videos on YouTube; 3) advertisements in national newspapers and on national television; and 4) Community Workshops based on the ‘Camp Obama’ model.

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1 These tools have been described as ‘enhanced engagement tools’ rather than ‘participatory decision-making tools’ (Balnaves 2010).
The purpose of this paper is to analyse a sample of GetUp!’s promotional videos on YouTube, thereby contributing to research in media studies about media activists taking hold of ‘symbolic power’ in order to control the representation of themselves and the issues they advance (Couldry 2002). The author argues that GetUp!’s YouTube videos are effective in gaining access to the symbolic power of the mainstream media and, at the same time, retaining control over production of their campaign messages. Tactics include production of visual media to be used as an ‘information source’ (Grabe & Bucy 2009, p. 26), and viral communication which is effective in creating a ‘media buzz’ (Castells 2009, p. 334).

The author examines six television advertisements and four promotional video clips presented by GetUp! in mainstream media and/or on their YouTube video channel. All of these videos were promoted on YouTube and most were aired on Australian national television between October 2009 and August 2010. In this paper two promotional videos are used as show pieces to illustrate the tactics GetUp! uses to mobilise engagement with specific issues. An example of the tactics that GetUp! practise is to construct a narrative arc that becomes an imaginative device in which members/citizens can envision how their individual participation can effect communal change within a broad social and political framework. The videos are analysed in the last section of the paper.

The paper begins with a brief background of GetUp!, followed by a discussion of media activism generally and the use of tactics employing new technologies. A short discussion of the methodological approach is next. After that two promotional videos are analysed in-depth. The purpose of this analysis is to reveal the techniques used by GetUp! to mobilise individuals to engage and participate in political action. The success of GetUp!’s tactics overall is undoubted but it is very difficult to measure the effectiveness of any of any of their tactics individually (Marks 2010).

Background

GetUp! began in 2005 as an Australian not-for-profit, grassroots community advocacy organisation that relies on public donations. The organisation’s aim is to build an accountable and progressive Australian Parliament and ostensibly it does not support any particular political party (About GetUp! FAQ, n.d.). GetUp!’s advocacy of particular issues places them outside mainstream partisan politics — despite the fact that they are sometimes referred to as a ‘left-leaning lobby group’. Often descriptors such as this suggest that political activism — that is, ‘action’ and ‘participation’ — is aligned with radicalism and disruption of the status quo.

For some, GetUp! is considered to be a ‘pressure group’ that focuses on key issues. Pressure group in this sense means putting pressure on the government. Others believe GetUp!’s primary function is to produce ‘call to action’ posts in order to achieve two things: first, to influence legislation; and

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2 Pickerall (2009, p. 989) in her work on the anti-war movements calls for more in-depth analysis on how mobilising works using ICT’s.

3 One recent successful tactic was GetUp!’s action in the High Court to change the electoral law regarding the closing off of the electoral role. This action was won and the law was changed for the 2010 federal election. GetUp! ‘won 98,000 additional Australians the right to vote, spoke with 1.1 million voters on the ground and ran over 700 TV ads’ (Home. GetUp! — Action for Australia, n.d.) during the election campaign period.


5 E.P. Thompson reveals the history of this view in his account of the London Corresponding Society (LCS) — a working-class reform movement that contributed to the development and maturing of a ‘distinct working-class consciousness’ in the 18th century (1968, p. 199).
second, to facilitate online/offline civic engagement to change ‘norms’. GetUp! could also be considered an ‘extra-parliamentary power-monitoring institution’, an emerging form of democracy that John Keane terms ‘monitory democracy’ (2009, p. 14). In terms of currency of engagement, GetUp! allows another way of participating to emerge that does not necessarily replace offline civic participatory groups.

Arguably GetUp! is also a global (as well as local) social and grassroots movement to reach a mass audience (Castells 2009). And, the author believes this reach is an attempt to gain access to what Couldry (2002) calls symbolic power. One of the major reasons (not the only one) global movements utilise the communicative space of the Internet is to foreground the issues that they consider need attention — to the public and decision makers — ‘both in the mainstream media and the Internet’ (Castells 2009, p. 327). Like GetUp! many of these global grassroots movements are not connected to any political party and, for this reason, the author regards them to be an example of media activism.

Media activism

GetUp! has content on YouTube that could be described as media participation that moves towards activism — if by ‘activism’ we mean urging or motivating others to think, reflect and respond, that is, to act for change. However, media activism for GetUp! constitutes an array of activities rather than a singular set of properties or practices (see Rodan & Balnaves 2009) that intersect and overlap within the context of media use and production (Meikle 2002).

With most of their campaigns GetUp! produces a YouTube video which can be accessed on its website and on the YouTube Channel GetUp! Digitalisation makes it easy for media activists’ ‘representational strategies’ that are produced for campaigns and/or advertisements in mainstream media to be transferred onto the web using YouTube and for a change of focus to be achieved quickly and effectively (Gillan, Pickerill & Webster 2008, pp. 49, 53). But in order to mobilise individuals to volunteer and participate, media activists on the web rely heavily on mainstream media for publicity of activists’ events and to ‘broaden the scope of conflict’ (Meikle 2003, p. 12; Vanneste cited in Cammaerts 2007, pp. 276–7). GetUp! produces advertisements to be aired in mainstream media that urge action, make direct personal appeals, and include footage of members participating in campaigns to mobilise members and the wider citizenry.

Media activists like GetUp! rely on the mainstream media for four key reasons: first, to make their position on issues visible to a wider audience (Vegh 2003, p. 92); second, to have symbolic power over how the movement is represented (Meikle 2003, p. 12); third to educate and inform the public about an issue (also see Gillan 2009, p. 28); and fourth to gain mainstream media coverage ‘to influence others’ (Gillan, Pickerill & Webster 2008, p. 163). For activist groups like GetUp! a high priority is to influence others to participate in their campaigns. Because ‘the mass media constitute a very important battleground for activists’ (Vegh 2003, p. 92), even GetUp! whose core governance is the Internet, want access to the mainstream media.

Wide visibility of GetUp!’s campaigns is most likely to be achieved through the use of visual media such as television and YouTube (Grabe & Bucy 2009; Papacharissi 2010, p. 151). Studies have shown that adult viewers have greater recall of images of news events — between ‘70% and 80%’ — than of text (Grabe & Bucy 2009, p. 17); therefore, media activists want their issues and information to be aired on mainstream media so they can widely publicise contentious matters.

6 ‘Monitory’ democracy’ is defined by Keane as ‘a “post-Westminster” form of democracy in which power-monitoring and power-controlling devices have begun to extend sideways and downwards through the whole political order’. Some of the institutions he considers taking part in ‘power-monitoring’ include ‘workplace tribunals’, ‘citizens’ assemblies’, ‘vigils’, ‘“blogging” and other forms of media scrutiny’ etc. (see John Keane’s The Life and Death of Democracy, 2009, p. 14).
(Vegh 2003, p. 92). Gaining access to the symbolic power of the mainstream media and, at the same time, retaining control over production of their campaign messages, allows GetUp! to create a viral campaign.

GetUp!’s promotional videos from YouTube have found their way onto mainstream television such as Q&A (ABC 2010), The 7pm Project (Channel 10 2010), and Lateline (2010). So media activists campaigns/positions on the Internet may also be reported without their involvement with the mainstream media; it is evident that ‘journalists keep a close eye on the internet and its traffic’ including comments through blogs in their websites (Gillan, Pickerill & Webster 2008, pp. 33–4). For instance, GetUp! is featured in The Monthly (October 2010), the national Australian politics, society and culture magazine. The article credits GetUp! with buying ‘700 television ad spots’ and at the same time raising the ‘profile of mental health’ (Marks 2010, p. 31). Despite the way in which media activists campaigns are sourced, ultimately this kind of media exposure creates a ‘media buzz’ (Castells 2009, p. 334).

Having control over the way in which issues and campaigns are represented is a high priority for media activist groups like GetUp! Gillan, Pickerill & Webster (2008, p. 57) point out in their discussion of the anti-war movement that ICTs enable groups to ‘exercise increased control over how they are represented’ which enables such groups to deepen and broaden ‘the symbolic materials used to represent the anti-war movement’ (2008, p. 46). As Couldry (2002, p. 25) puts it, such practices ‘contest (in some way) media power itself, that is, the concentration of symbolic power in media institutions’. The significance of contesting, Couldy claims, is in refusing to credit mainstream media with symbolic power over all representations. GetUp!’s contesting is launched from a diverse range of media using narrative and symbols to mobilise individuals to consider how the message is mediated.

**Tactics in communicative space**

GetUp! tend to use tactics and strategies that are ongoing, although many of its mainstream television advertisements are more tactical in that they do exploit the television scheduling, the moment, the now. GetUp!’s advertisements are one-off (not serial), but they may be shown more than once on television. One challenge for media activists like GetUp! is that ‘tactical media’ campaigns can quickly attract attention and dissipate just as quickly before achieving key aims (Lovink 2008, p. 187; Scholz cited in Boler 2008, p. 356). de Certeau’s distinction between strategies and tactics is useful for analysing how media activists use television and YouTube Internet communicative spaces to mobilise participation, and to inform, and engage citizens. In de Certeau’s The Practice of Everyday Life (1984) ‘a strategy is about exploiting place — a business, for instance, that defines its territory and then uses this as the basis for its relations with its customers, works from the privileging of place over time’ (cited in Meikle 2002, p. 121). A strategy can also be about managing life within an institution (e.g. within the media); strategies tend to be systematic and persistent (de Certeau 1984), such as working within a system to create an autonomous space. A tactic ‘exploits time — the moments of opportunity and possibility made possible as cracks appear in the evolution of strategic place’ (Meikle 2002, p. 121). Whereas tactics are often used to take advantage of gaps in the system, they are made up of isolated events and are usually one off (de Certeau 1984). As de Certeau (1984, p. xix) observes:

> A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalise on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to

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7 ‘The term “tactical media”, says Geert Lovink, “was proposed in the 1992. It emphasises the use of new technologies, [and] temporary coalitions between artists, designers, activists, theorists and critics who are working both inside and outside the mainstream media.” (cited in Meikle 2002, p. 120). Activist’s use media that is most appropriate at any given time for any given purpose.
circumstances … Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities’.

The author’s analysis in the second part of the paper investigates the tactics deployed by GetUp! in promotional video clips to engage members and citizens to participate in political action. Advertising and video promotions play a significant role in GetUp!’s campaign actions. They are a means of linking the GetUp! membership to the wider community and building momentum around specific campaigns. The strategic airing of TV advertisements is crucial to GetUp!’s effectiveness and potency since it maximises public awareness of issues and creates interest and support. But because television is ephemeral (unless individuals videotape or use PVRs), YouTube offers a more durable communicative space for images that members and non-members can access. In this regard, GetUp!’s television advertisements and YouTube videos are relevant to the generation of issue-based ‘movements’ that have a participatory ethos. Having symbolic power over media representations (Couldry 2002) enables GetUp! to retain control over campaign messages, which the author argues is essential to media activists garnering participation through a viral campaign.

But perhaps the best media activists can offer is the tools they use to advocate for political action. Below is the GetUp! Blog — Your Voice, Your Vision (n.d.) a recent tool GetUp! has used to show the voices of members, as well as to advocate about issues. This online blog allows members to vote for the top ten issues and/or leave comments; the latter can then be voted and/or added to by other members:

**Campaign Ideas Forum**

Do you have a campaign suggestion, or a great idea for a tactic that would improve a current GetUp campaign? Search below to see if it’s already here, and if so, you can add your support by voting for it. If not, add your own idea below.

GetUp can’t campaign on everything — but if your campaign idea is of national interest and will help create a progressive Australia, it might get up!

1. **I suggest a campaign about…**

Search

This tool can serve for ongoing engagement with members rather than as a tactic to mobilise participation. But it is also a way of co-opting voluntary labour (see Murdock 2010). In the case of GetUp!, volunteering, according to Balnaves (2010) is ‘based on trust that GetUp! will represent my interests in some way’. Reading member’s response to GetUp! Blog — Your Voice Your Vision, the author gets the impression, but not all feel this way, that most members consider GetUp! focuses on their concerns.

**Methodology**

Individual advertisements/videos for this project were initially selected from the emails sent by GetUp! to its members from 1 January to 30 June 2010. The GetUp! emails provided a frame of reference for the choice of advertisements because most of those selected for analysis are related to ongoing campaign actions. Some of the advertisements were released slightly earlier or later than this timeframe.8 Videos and advertisements outside the 1 January to 30 June 2010 timeframe were generally of particular relevance to the Australian Federal Election (August 2010).

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8 For example, iCoal 2.0 - posted on Channel GetUp! 12 October 2009; Election Trailer Spoof - posted on Channel GetUp! 5 July 2010; Coffee with Julia Gillard parody ad - posted 12 July 2010; Tony Abbott’s archaic ways - posted on Channel GetUp! 2 August 2010.
All the examples included in this research were accessed from the YouTube videos currently available on Channel GetUp! (accessed from the homepage of GetUp!’s website — http://www.getup.org/).9 Of the ten visual texts analysed, six are advertisements that were aired on Australian television as distinct from promotional videos.10 The other four advertisements were only shown on YouTube: Tony, abstinence is not a climate change option; Pulp mill whistleblower speaks; Internet censorship Australia; and Election spoof trailer.

In analysing the activist advertisements on YouTube and the GetUp! website the author recognised that media activists emphasise one issue over another, certain links over others, and specific kinds of symbolic representations etc. Using semiotics to analyse the videos, the author focused on how individuals were mobilised to engage and participate in campaigns. The author was also mindful that ‘the point of consumption’ (Richardson 2007, p. 41) is part of the production of visual media. In this sense consumers of YouTube videos do not simply read the information and take it on board; they tend to also ‘decode texts’ (Condit cited in Richardson 2007, p. 41). So in this regard the method was not limited to a semiotic analysis.

Analysis of advertisements

The GetUp! advertisements and promotional videos focus on issues of significance to contemporary Australia such as climate change, the protection of native forests, mental health reform, refugees, internet censorship, and electoral enrolment.11 In the videos the main tactic for engaging and mobilising individuals to participate and ultimately act is narrative arcs, that is imaginative devices that enable/induce the individual to imagine how their participation can effect change. So the videos address viewers as individuals, and build into the narratives how an individual’s participation can effect change for the community.

As mentioned above, part of the narrative of GetUp!’s advertisements and promotional videos is to show the connection between individual participation and communal action. By defining communal

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9 Six GetUp! advertisements aired from 1 October 2009–31 August 2010 are listed below:
Riz Wakil (former Afghan refugee: https://www.getup.org.au/campaign/EndMandatoryDetention&id=1042
Icoal: https://www.getup.org.au/campaign/ClimateActionNow&id=791
Women’s ad: https://www.getup.org.au/campaign/Australia_GetsUp_2010&id=1251
Gillard Dare climate ad: https://www.getup.org.au/campaign/ClimateActionNow&id=1181
Mental Health: http://www.getup.org.au/campaign/healthreform&id=979
(S. Mclean, GetUp!, personal communication, 11 September 2010.)
The remaining four advertisements — Tony, abstinence is not a climate change option, Pulp mill whistleblower speaks, Internet censorship Australia and Election spoof trailer — discussed in this paper are on YouTube.

10 The outcome of the Australian Federal Election (2010) has been interpreted by some as signifying a shift from the system of mainstream party politics towards an issues-based political sensibility which suggests that the current desire of many Australians is to prioritise issues like climate change within political debate. For example, speaking on ABC television Q&A (30 August 2010), John Keane, author of The Life and Death of Democracy, stated:
I think this is a black swan moment in Australian politics. I think that we’re at the end of the road of stage managed two party politics. It has collapsed in every other Westminster model. This is the last one where it has collapsed and more than that I think we are at the end of Labor-style politics, not only in machine terms but I think the naive belief in progress, industrial progress, and the attachment to high carbon industrial growth, I think that’s coming to an end and I think the Green vote, which Christine has rightly emphasised is huge and potentially much bigger than the Democrats vote, is the canary in the mineshaft, to mix metaphors. I think it’s a sign of something of a tectonic shift that’s happening and I would say that it’s also putting on the agenda the need for big visions of Australia in the future and it’s either backward looking or it’s multicultural within Asia, low carbon, a small player that’s powerful in the world because of our ability to speak openly to our friends. That’s a big vision that I think has been put on the table. We didn’t hear anything of that during the election. That’s the tragedy of it.
action as a ‘movement’, GetUp! validates the efforts of individuals who ‘chip in’ to bring about a movement for social and political change. Temporal and spatial dimensions are used in the advertisements and promotional videos to imagine a better future, to engage and mobilise individuals to act and imagine they are part of a movement that effects change. In that sense GetUp! members could believe that having some symbolic power over media representations enables them to promote the issues of most concern and produce campaign messages they personally endorse.

The Internet Censorship Australia promotional video

GetUp!’s Internet Censorship Australia promotional video aims to expose the ‘futility behind the Rudd Government’s censorship agenda’ (GetUp! personal communication, 10 May 2010). The YouTube video coincides with debate about the issue in mainstream media programs such as Four Corners and Q&A. GetUp! claims to have conducted their largest ever survey on this issue, with over $100,000 being donated to help produce the ‘action packed’ advertisement against internet filtering (GetUp! personal communication, 10 May 2010).

The narrative begins with the story of the Rudd Government’s support for a mandatory internet filter that ‘should block access to ‘prohibited’ material’ (Fact Sheet — Internet Censorship, n.d.). This story begins in November 2007 with the announcement of the mandatory internet filtering plan by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy. It incorporates the stages through which the policy issue has evolved, including various problems encountered over the years: such as revelations that the intended approach was ineffective; the rising tide of public dissent; and the Government’s current temporary suspension of the project (while problems with implementation are sorted out). One segment states, ‘In June 2009 Conroy is shown how to bypass the filter in numerous ways in one hour.’

Included in the narrative is the story of the movement against internet censorship conducted by GetUp! members — the words ‘Your momentum built a movement’ gleam on the screen. GetUp! as a movement is linked to the idea of freedom from censorship through the visual iconography in the video. For instance, the video opens with visual images of the GetUp! brand name and its insignia exclamation mark which dominates the city skyline. The sound effects of thunder, combined with the gladiator music and mobile camera, suggest the elemental force with which GetUp’s anti-net censorship movement is advancing. GetUp!’s role is indicated via references to past GetUp!’s print and television advertisements such as the Censordyne campaign, specific media grabs featuring well known media personalities discussing GetUp! (e.g. The ABC’s Tony Jones) and details of the money raised by GetUp! members. The detail illustrates the momentum GetUp! members have built around the issue of mandatory internet filtering.

The GetUp! exclamation mark suspended over the illumined night city-scape (in the opening sequence) indicates the grassroots participation on this particular issue has been momentous. The opening image in these video positions viewers to recognise the enormous impact of GetUp! members’ participation. Towards the end of the clip the words ‘[t]hanks to you, the filter is on life support’ appear on the screen. GetUp! hope that members’ support will help ‘pull the plug’ on the filter plan. Viewers are urged in the concluding part of the video to ‘[m]ake it viral — tell everyone you know about this campaign’ via social networking forums.

A call for Internet freedom through the use of visuals links the various elements of the video. The camera moves between contemporary cityscape drawing the viewer into the perspective of being inside the information super highway. Extracts from newspaper headlines are projected onto city buildings and/or hang in the cyberspaces between them — television interviews, political speeches and television commercials tell the story of the internet filtering saga as the video progresses. Interview snippets and/or statements from recognisable media and political personalities such ABC reporter and interviewer, Tony Jones, US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and US Ambassador to Australia, Jeffrey Bleich, are used to argue for Internet freedom. In one sequence Tony Jones (from the ABC TV show Q&A) presents Senator Conroy with petitions containing 2000 signatures against
internet filtering. Snatches from speeches by Clinton and Bleich at the end of the video stipulate the importance of supporting internet freedom. Ms Clinton describes the internet as a network sustaining all other networks which, by virtue of its very nature, should be free. US Ambassador Bleich graphically compares the internet to natural frontiers such as the oceans, outer space, the sky and the polar caps — all of which are spaces to be shared.

Towards the end of the video, GetUp! thanks its members and restates the outcomes of members’ participation — specifically mentioning the survey results and money raised in support of this issue. GetUp! asks members to continue their support by going ‘viral’ through My Space, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. The call to make the campaign viral makes a connection between individual and communal action. It can also enable access to the symbolic power of the mainstream media while, at the same time, retaining control over production of their campaign messages. Essential to media activists creating a viral campaign, that is, potent and effective, the author argues is that information about issues is aired on mainstream media.

Time and space are imaginatively constructed through the visuals to reinforce the idea of internet freedom. The idea that the Internet is free and fluid, and, therefore, should be unrestrained is depicted through the constant movement of the camera, and superimposition of images creating cyberspace as an open sphere. Images are projected onto reflective exteriors of city skyscrapers signifying that open and uncensored communications are essential to contemporary urban life. The ‘here’ and ‘now’ is depicted by the high-tech urban panorama suggesting that communicative spaces are connected through and in time.

In one scene, the mobile camera swings from the space between city buildings into the private interior of a city apartment where a young couple sits on their couch looking at a full page GetUp! advertisement in a newspaper. On the flat screen TV in front them, GetUp!’s satric Censordyne promotional is video playing. Viewers are invited to share these experiences as they are positioned to look over the shoulders of the couple to the newspaper and the screen. The transition from remote city spaces — associated with politics, finance, business and economics — to the intimate private space of the couple (family and home) implies that new media technologies have the potential to connect private to public space.

The movement from the exterior world into the home personalises the impact of the Government’s proposed policies on mandatory internet filtering and implies that internet filtering will potentially affect every citizen. The focus on the domestic sphere accentuates the notion of democratic rights and responsibilities — under threat are our individual rights to free speech and freedom to access information. GetUp!’s representative Oliver MacColl appears on screen saying that he does not want Senator Conroy ‘in his living room’ telling him how to parent his children and what he can watch on the Internet. The image of Senator Conroy’s physical presence in the intimate space of the family home is an alarming reminder of the potential loss of freedom.

The focus on the young couple is a mobilising strategy that reflects some of the ideas around individual rights and responsibilities. Although viewers do not see the faces of the white heterosexual young twenty-something couple, viewers are positioned to adopt the couple’s point of view. GetUp!’s advertisements — in the paper and on TV — are placed within this intimate private environment, linking their position on internet filtering with the views, attitudes and best interests of ordinary Australian people. Often in these advertisements the individual is normalised and mobilised through colloquial expressions and simplified types such as whistleblower, corporate boss, and ordinary Australian people etc are used.

Images suggestive of countries with less progressive communications policies than Australia — identified as Iraq, North Korea, China and Cuba — are reflected on the glassy skyscraper walls in one part of the video. Citing these specific countries brings to mind how much Australians stand to lose if they choose not to support GetUp! in its advocacy for internet freedoms.
The Election 2010 Spoof Trailer promotional video encourages Australians to enrol and vote in the 2010 Australian Federal election and introduces key election issues such as carbon pollution and refugees (Election 2010 Spoof Trailer 2010). The video has received 400,000 hits on the YouTube site and was featured on Q&A (ABC TV) to promote the show’s Get Enrolled to Vote Competition. The faces of Julia (‘Goolia’) Gillard (the Prime Minister) and her rival, Tony Abbott (the Opposition leader), are superimposed onto contemporary film action figures. Sequences from action movies are edited together to form a fast-paced trailer (presumably for the upcoming election). The series of face-offs depicted between Julia ‘Goolia’ and her adversary, Tony Abbot, parody the political environment in the lead-up to the 2010 Australian Federal election. The video is replete with intertextual references from contemporary politics and popular culture. Wielding weapons and well aimed kung-fu style kicks, Julia Goolia’s ‘action woman’ holds her ground against Tony Abbott’s ‘action man’. Kevin Rudd and Bob Brown also make cameo appearances.

The video narrative equates contemporary Australian politics with the high intensity drama of the Hollywood action genre — that is, adversaries are pitted against each other in a series of high-tech challenges. Confrontations between political opponents are a mixture of finely choreographed athleticism and technical expertise. Large weapons, explosions, shoot-outs and car crashes — typical of the action genre — are presented as part of the action landscape of contemporary Australian politics. Physical prowess is matched by menacing dialogue, some of which is drawn from politics rather than film. For example, one sequence uses Tony Abbott’s words, ‘politicians are going to be judged on everything they say. Sometimes in the heat of discussion, you go a little bit further …’ Australian viewers who are aware of this infamous statement by Mr Abbott, could be alerted to the social and political impact of his words.

Events from recent Australian politics are reconstructed through the genre of the Hollywood-style action narrative. It begins with footage of former Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, engaging with the Australian people and stating that he will be a Prime Minister for ‘all Australians’. Julia Goolia is introduced as the ‘new name’ in Australian politics and the action quickly segues to a confrontation between Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard. Rudd pleads, ‘fair suck of the sauce bottle!’ as Gillard swipes him with a sword. Using such expressions foregrounds the ways in which politician’s seize the everyday for their own ends. The transition from Rudd to Abbott as Julia Gillard’s primary concern is signified in the words on screen, ‘This year one awkward relationship will determine the election.’ Abbott and Gillard are then depicted in a romantic repose and as Tony moves to kiss her, Julia quips: ‘Tony’s been a bit naughty today’. The clip outlines what is at stake between the adversaries, claiming ‘battle lines have been drawn’.

The intensity of the action is accentuated by music and sound effects, including loud, rhythmic drum based music and the SFX accompanying explosions, crashes, gun fire and sword play. Images of people behind bars in detention centres, tumultuous ocean waves, and a baby monkey appearing to fall backwards off a tree branch in a forest introduce refugees and carbon pollution pointing to key issues defining the struggle between the adversaries. The intensity of the action narrative deepens as text on screen states: ‘This August? … Two parties will collide … Only 1 winner’. The battle to win is the focus of the subsequent confrontations between Tony and Julia for the remainder of the video.

The narrative works as a strategy to encourage participation because the story needs the input of the public to reach its conclusion — that is, Australian politics relies on the participation of voters. The narrative style of the video implies that the public needs to be vigilant against destructive forces, such as apathy within the political landscape. It encourages viewers to use their vote to conclude the

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12 Intertextual references to films include Die Hard 4 (2007) in which a car is driven off a toll ramp into the flight path of a helicopter causing a spectacular mid-air crash.
narrative in a socially and politically responsible way. A strong appeal to individual viewers is made towards the end of the video to take responsibility for the outcome of this action narrative. A series of written statements punctuate the concluding images: ‘Time is running out’, ‘Enrol’, ‘Vote’, ‘Have your say’, ‘Demand action’. These statements address the viewer as individuals. At the same time, they draw the individual into the shared cultural and political narrative constructed by the action video. Individual and communal appeal moves the message of the video beyond the parody to the power of individual political action. Thus, the notion that recent events in Australian politics have played out like the plot of an action film is transcended so that the real focus of the video becomes the relationship between individual action and democracy.

The action film genre is perhaps most pertinent for younger audiences (Generation Y?) and traditionally appealed to males; however, the introduction of Julia Goolia as the incumbent female warrior broadens the gender appeal of the plot. The video encourages the viewer to imagine or envisage a future (for Australia) beyond the plotline that is presented. Even though the narrative focuses on recent events in Australian politics, it transcends time and place to represent an archetypal struggle between two opposing parties within Australian democracy — a battle over symbolic power that is specific to the Australian political landscape. Ultimately, the viewer (e.g. the voter) has the power to create history by defining the outcome of the struggle. By communicating the individual’s power to affect history GetUp!’s tactic encourages participation in the political process — in this case, motivating individuals who are eligible, but not enrolled to vote, to add their names to the electoral role.

The video ends with four mock-postscripts which contextualise political events in the now. For example, there is a mock rating of five stars from Vanity Fair as well as a comment from Margaret and David (At the Movies, ABC TV) stating that the 2010 election is ‘The best election since 2007’. ‘I prefer the prequel’ writes Kevin Rudd. The ABC’s Kerry O’Brien claims, ‘So good you’ll want to vote twice.’ Humour and irony establish distance between the audience and the issues without alienating them from the purpose of the video which is to engage those who need to enrol to vote.

Using Ricoeur’s ideas, the connection between communicative spaces and GetUp!’s tactics to mobilise participation in the promotional videos can be explained as building ‘a sense of collective identity by building narratives around specific events’ (cited in Albrechtslund 2010, p. 116) — in the case of GetUp! narratives are built around specific issues rather than events per se. Also as illustrated, GetUp!’s narratives tend to cohere around inter-textual political and popular culture references and in the way members make sense of their participation. Following Ricoeur, Albrechtslund claims ‘narrative plays a crucial role in how we make sense of ourselves’ (2010, p. 116). Individuals and groups ‘need the dynamic features of narrative to address the temporality of our existence’ (Albrechtslund 2010, p. 116). Thus GetUp!’s mobilising tactics reveal the power of narratives as a way of connecting members (narrated as political activists) to political participation in the community.

Conclusion

In this paper the author examined some of GetUp!’s videos used as visual media tools to engage members and the wider citizenry. The author found that GetUp!’s YouTube videos to be potent and effective as tactics to gain access to the symbolic power of the mainstream media and at the same time retain control over production of their campaign messages. Tactics include production of visual media to be used as an ‘information source’ (Grabe & Bucy 2009, p. 26), viral communication which is effective in creating a ‘media buzz’ (Castells 2009, p. 334). One of the main tactics that GetUp! practise in their YouTube videos is to construct a narrative arc that becomes an imaginative device in which members/citizens can envision how their individual participation can effect communal change within a broad social and political framework. Getup!’s narratives provide a link between projecting one’s self into an imagined participation and being mobilised to actually participate. Their YouTube videos and advertisements are narrative communicative spaces that
contextualise individual participation and focus collective identity in relation to specific events (Albrechtslund 2010, p. 116).

The Internet has in recent years become a central tool, especially for mobilising citizens to engage and participate in political activities. Having symbolic power over media representations is essential for media activists to create a viral campaign. Internet communicative spaces do need to be freely available for grassroots movements to produce and disseminate this symbolic work.

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