Personalising politics in a global crisis: The media communication techniques of John Curtin and Franklin D. Roosevelt in the Pacific War, 1941-45

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Abstract

During their Pacific war alliance, Curtin and Roosevelt expanded the national leader's use of the media to symbolise a more public persona of governance that involved citizens in crisis discussions. While the 'personalisation of politics' is a growing scholarly topic, there is a lack of research on the two leaders' use of relatively new media to evoke perceptions of their direct communications with publics during this conflict. Although they benefited from censorship, this study of their communication techniques reveals insights into how political leaders have framed media rhetoric and camera imagery to convey their administrations as increasingly inclusive public spaces.

Keywords: John Curtin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, political communication, media rhetoric, World War II.

Introduction

John Curtin developed the Australian prime minister's use of communications technology and practices to create the appearance of a more public persona of the national office, making this seem more accessible to mass audiences. The Australian Labor Party prime minister's use of the media and popular culture, including film, radio and newspapers, resembled US Democratic President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's techniques to communicate more frequently and openly than his predecessors. Yet there is a gap in the scholarly knowledge of how both leaders used the media to convey a more personal style of politics and win citizens' trust in their Pacific war strategies. Through camera-ready events, they cultivated symbolism, rhetoric and visual imagery to portray their egalitarian relationships with citizens to defend shared values and overcome the conflict. Although their media communications were heavily stylised, they provided more of a public glimpse into their decision-making, seemingly reducing the traditional distance between the national leader and citizens. They aimed to evoke perceptions they were involving media audiences in crisis discussions by generating semblances of candid news talks, close-up public conversations and broadcast rhetoric accentuating their active, participative leaderships (Alexander, Papers, 1941-45; Cinesound Productions 1941a; Movietone 1943, 1944; National Film and Sound Archive 1944a; Universal Studios 1941). This study reveals fresh insights into how the two leaders' communication techniques contributed to illusions of their intimate, dynamic relations with news audiences.

Both Curtin and Roosevelt faced particular challenges to appear as personable national leaders and secure citizens' confidence in their governance. Following a succession of four prime ministers between April 1939 and October 1941, Curtin was appointed to be the next national

leader after two independent politicians crossed the parliamentary jarrah parquet floor to vote against the rival conservative government. With the onset of the Pacific war two months later, Curtin developed close, professional relationships with journalists and held twice-daily, confidential news briefings to persuade them to support his Australian defence priorities (Coatney 2009; Lloyd 1988). After the Japanese bombing of the Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawaii on 7 December 1941, Roosevelt used the media to show his resolve to retaliate against the enemy forces swiftly (Universal Studios 1941). While he endorsed the 'beat Hitler first' strategy to secure the US alliances with Britain and Russia, his administration's surveys indicated that many Americans were more interested in fighting Japan's military government (Steele 1974). To convey his empathy for this public goal, he broadcast film and radio talks to link him more closely to the Pacific military victories (British Movietone News 1943; British Pathé[2] 1941, 1942a, 1942b, 1942c, 1943; Castle Films 1941; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum 1944; Movietone 1942, 1943, 1944; Paramount News 1944; Roosevelt 1941a, 1941b, 1942a, 1942b, 1942c, 1942d, 1944; Universal Studios 1941). As Curtin expanded his media talks to more global audiences (1942, 1944a, 1944b), he generated favourable news coverage in Britain, Canada and the US on the need to protect Australia from Japanese attacks (Department of External Affairs 1944; Great Britain Foreign Office 1944; Publicity…1941; National Film and Sound Archive 1944a; Cinesound Review & Movietone News 1941-45). This study shows how both leaders used their relations with journalists, along with the relatively new media of radio and popular newsreels, to deliver personalised messages to appear to involve more citizens in national discussions on their Pacific war strategies.

Literature review

A growing number of scholars have attributed the rise of 'personality politics' in democracies to a leader's ability to use the media and gain public consensus for defending shared values in a time of crisis (Castells 2007; Garzia 2011; Weber 1968). Researchers have increasingly explored concepts of the 'charismatic leader' since Max Weber's (1922) influential political ideas that this is linked to a person's 'specifically exceptional power or qualities' (Tucker 1968, p. 731; Pinto & Larsen 2006). According to Weber (1968, p. 48), the presence of a situation of crisis can significantly boost the political leader's role, causing the public to treat him or her as being endowed with 'superhuman' powers to overcome problems. Early indications of the 'personalisation of politics' emerged by the mid-1920s including a silent cinema advertisement of Australian Prime Minister Stanley Bruce and limited filming of US President Calvin Coolidge (Edwards 2004; Young 2003). Some studies have traced the rise of this political process to the television age of the 1950s and 1960s. To communicate successfully through the medium of television, democratic leaders have increasingly attempted to appear more ordinary than extraordinary to show their rapport with voters, who view them from an 'everyman' framework (Greenstein 2004; Meyrowitz 1985). Since the mid-1990s, more scholars have examined the familiarity of the public persona during the age of mediated reproduction of political parties' main messages to media audiences (Poguntke & Webb 2005). Yet there is a gap in the understanding of how Curtin and Roosevelt used the filmed news of their day to symbolise direct relations of trust with citizens in the Pacific war.

   While some authors have taken a pessimistic view towards the rise of commercialised news and 'personality politics' (Adorno & Horkheimer 1944; Habermas 1989), other theorists have rejected the notion that the expanding media have resulted in a sense of social alienation and disenfranchisement among voters (Fiske 2010; Hartley 1996). These debates have often centred

on Jürgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere (1989), a specific domain of national discussion about the governance of society and people including the media. Particularly communication and cultural studies have recognised the democratic, liberating function of the media to involve citizens in public discussions (North & Dearman 2010). Despite the constraints of wartime censorship and propaganda, political leaders increasingly used the expanding media to create the appearance of their direct interactions with citizens. This study aims to further the literature on the wartime public sphere by revealing insights into the Curtin and Roosevelt media strategies for conveying a sense of openness and transparency about their administrations that assisted in citizenship-building (Habermas 1989; Uhr 2002; Young 2003).

There has not been a systematic study of how Curtin and Roosevelt used the relatively new media as distinctive strategies to strengthen their Pacific war leaderships. Authors and biographers have commented that both leaders benefited from their media backgrounds by establishing mainly positive relations with journalists. Due to his family's poor financial circumstances, Curtin left his school by the age of 14, but privately studied philosophy, politics, poetry and oratory as he was promoted to be a labour newspaper editor and Australian Journalists' Association district president (Ross 1977). He generally held twice-daily media briefings, including off-the-record talks, during his prime ministership between 7 October 1941 and 5 July 1945 (Coatney 2009; Lloyd 1988; Lloyd & Hall 1997). From a wealthy New York family, Roosevelt was the managing editor and president of his university's newspaper, *The Harvard Crimson*, while an undergraduate. Similarly to Curtin's briefings, Roosevelt's interviews represented a significant departure from the more formal, structured briefings of his predecessors. Roosevelt generally gave twice-weekly news conferences during his presidency from 8 March 1933 to 5 April 1945 (Levin 2008; Perloff 1998; Winfield 1990). Both men were their nations' first leaders to appoint full-time press secretaries, who aided their close communications to journalists. Through their media relations, they delegated censorship to bureaucrats and elicited journalists' cooperation in suppressing news that might have alerted enemies to Allied military maneuvers (Coatney 2009; Steele 1985; Sweeney 2001). Scholars have discussed how Roosevelt's 'fireside chats', beginning in 1933, encouraged listeners to engage more readily in conversations about topics of governance, but these have not focused on his broadcasts about Australian security and war in the Pacific region (Craig 2000; Doherty 1999; Ryfe 2001). Several scholars have examined the impact of a limited range of Curtin's radio and newsreel talks in wartime Australia (Coatney 2012; Day 1999, 2000; Ward 1999). This paper more specifically investigates Curtin's use of radio, film and off-the-record news talks to project seemingly close interactions with public audiences. The study intends to help advance the understanding of how Curtin and Roosevelt developed the media to win public support for their Pacific war roles by conveying the appearance of trust between them and mass audiences.

Methodology

To gain a deeper insight into both leaders' use of the media, this study is informed by the public sphere concept, as developed in communications and cultural studies, and also based on Manuel Castells' analysis of power. The concept of the public sphere assists in understanding how the wartime electronic media provided more opportunities for political leaders to replicate images of direct communication between them and citizens (Habermas 1989). Through their use of the media, Curtin and Roosevelt aimed to elicit public confidence in their Pacific war deliberations by communicating more openly and frequently with journalists and publics than their predecessors. According to Castells (2007), communication and information are fundamental

sources of power. In Castells' view, media politics has led to the 'personalization of politics' around leaders, who create symbolic messages of trust about themselves that will obtain citizens' support. The political messages 'must be couched in the specific language of the media' if these are to be communicated successfully to citizens. This study analyses the multimedia messages of Curtin and Roosevelt to ascertain how they appeared to be the 'symbolic embodiment of trust', making their governance seem more open when communicating their resolve to win the Pacific conflicts (Castells, 2007, pp. 241-242).

Furthermore, this article uses a dramaturgy approach to explore the more stylised aspects of the two leaders' political tactics to create symbolic messages of trust. By communicating about policies in clear, appealing terms through the popular entertainment settings of the era, a leader can secure the spectators' collective participation in an event and satisfy the public desire for the liberating function of free speaking (Bourdieu 1980). This study of the Curtin and Roosevelt newsreels reveals their use of rehearsed rhetoric, practised gestures and camera techniques to seemingly reduce the traditional divide between the national leader and movie audiences (20th Century Fox-Movietone News 1945; Australian Government Department of Information 1939-1945; British Movietone News 1943; British Pathé 1941, 1942a, 1942b, 1942c, 1943; Castle Films 1941; Cinesound Productions 1941a; Cinesound Productions & Cinesound Review 1941-45; Cinesound Review & Movietone News 1941-45; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum 1944; Movietone 1942, 1943, 1944; Movietone News 1941, 1944; Paramount News 1944; Roosevelt 1941a, 1942a, 1942b, 1942c, 1942d, 1944; National Film and Sound Archive 1944a, 1944b, 1945; Universal Studios 1941). This analysis is also informed by John Uhr's insights into a leader's 'art of speech' as a device of outwardly deprecating personal control while gaining credibility and power for appearing as an 'ordinary', like-minded citizen (2002, p. 278). From a sample of screened and unissued newsreels, an analysis is made of the close-up camera angles, shots and signs, or meaning, based on Arthur Asa Berger's semiotic film conventions (1982). This analysis will show how the media collaborated with the two leaders to portray the semblance of a close, active relationship between them and moviegoers.

Moreover, this paper includes an analysis of relevant rhetoric to find out how Curtin and Roosevelt made their Pacific war messages seem appealing, accessible and open to public audiences. A leader's use of a formal speaking style indicates a distancing from mass audiences and desire to keep them at arm's length (Bourdieu 1980). This rhetorical analysis draws upon Judith Brett's approach of delving into a political leader's broadcast timing and programming that helped to evoke illusions of conversing with listeners at home (2007). Also James Curran's insights have informed this study into the prime minister's use of the media to appear as 'the national opinion leader and mobiliser' (2004, p. 15). Thus an examination is made of the selection of words, oratorical pace and reading ease of the radio talks given by Curtin (1941a, 1942, 1943, 1944a) and Roosevelt (1941b, 1942a, 1942b, 1942c, 1942d, 1944) to determine their efforts to appear to relate with more citizens.

To evaluate whether Curtin and Roosevelt delivered messages in 'the specific language of the media', this article conducts a new comparison of their radio and film scripts' readability and their broadcast speaking rates. This study's readability measurements include the Flesch Reading Ease score and the Flesch-Kincaid score. The recommended Flesch-Kincaid score for most public documents is about eight, close to the reading level of 'middle-brow' newspapers and suitable for an eighth-grade student (Day 2008; Lim 2003). Ideally an accessible public document should have a Flesch Reading Ease score that is between 60 and 70, with a lower number indicating more complicated language. Expert recommendations have varied on the

optimal pace of public speech, with different scholars recommending between 100 and 125 words a minute (Lim 2003; Nichols and Stevens 1957). To gain more insights into the Australian leader's broadcasting influence, this analysis will contrast the accessibility of the selected Curtin radio scripts with a speech sample of Robert G. Menzies as a prime minister and wartime opposition member (1939, 1942a, 1942b, 1942c, 1942d, 1961, 1963).

As fledgling instruments of measuring audience reactions, public opinion polling had only begun in 1941 in Australia and was still developing in the US. Due to wartime paper rationing, news editors were allocating only occasional space for readers' letters. To discover the impact of the Curtin and Roosevelt media messages, this study ascertains whether journalists reproduced their statements favorably in the news (*Age*, *Canberra Times*, *New York Times*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Washington Post*, *West Australian* 1941-45). This analysis is based on the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism formula (2008) that a news article is deemed 'positive' if two-thirds of the statements appear to support a leader (Public Broadcasting Service 2009). By applying these methods and theoretical perspectives, this article aims to contribute to the increasing research on the relations between political communication and political trust.

Findings and discussion

Similarly to Roosevelt, Curtin used the broadcast media to develop the semblance of a personal rapport with more citizens by selecting inclusive language and evoking a shared sense of nationhood. Curtin's prime ministerial predecessors, including Joseph Lyons and Menzies, rarely used filmed and radio news to communicate directly to citizens; also they avoided interactive, open news conferences (Alexander 1971; Australia's Tasks 1941; Griffen-Foley 2002; Lloyd 1988; Martin & Hardy 1993; National Film and Sound Archive 2008; Tebbutt 1941). During his prime ministership, Curtin (1941-45) mainly broadcast in the first half of the week, often on Wednesday nights as late as 9 p.m., reaching wartime listeners increasingly working overtime and coinciding with the peak evening newspaper circulations. Wartime Australians indicated they listened to the prime ministerial broadcasts and read the speech texts in the next day's newspapers (Honeyman 1940; Thomson 1940). Curtin's broadcasting style resembled Roosevelt's decision to give 15-minute radio chats between Sunday and Tuesday evenings (Craig 2000). The prime minister's national talks contrasted with Menzies' opposition speeches that he selectively targeted to middle-class listeners at home on Friday nights at the end of their working weeks, a time when newspaper circulations would fall each weekend (Brett 2007). Furthermore, Curtin often aimed to shorten the prime minister's radio talks after publicised criticisms from listeners and broadcasters about his predecessor Menzies' 'monotonous lecture' delivery (Honeyman 1940; Thomson 1940, p. 3; Why Mr Menzies...1939). Press secretary Rodgers recalled Curtin's aversion to 'anything of great length' in oratory (1971). Consequently, Curtin's broadcast declaration of the Pacific war (1941a) was one-third shorter than Menzies' (1939) radio announcement of Australia's fight against Nazi Germany. Whereas the Canadian leader, Mackenzie King, privately noted Curtin's elaborate preparations for media talks (The diaries…1 June 1944, pp. 564-5), Rodgers helped to create the impression of the Australian prime minister spontaneously rewriting scripts, moments before broadcasting in front of journalists at the studios (1971; Mr. Curtin's quotation 1941; Mr. Curtin's two audiences 1943). Roosevelt's stylised technique of evoking images of 'fireside chats' from the White House basement studio might have influenced Curtin's decision to exploit the relatively new electronic media to develop a broadcast personality as a natural, open communicator.

Curtin applied a more inclusive tone, including some of the Roosevelt media techniques, for

his Pacific war speech. He greeted listeners as, 'Men and women of Australia', recognising female roles (1941a), compared with Menzies' address to 'fellow Australians' in the broadcast about the war against Germany (1939). Curtin was the first Australian prime minister to make an independent war declaration. At the Canberra radio studio, journalists remarked on his ability to quote spontaneously the radical Victorian English poet, Swinburne; in fact, he had carefully studied protest poetry to include in his speeches since he was a young labour orator (Curtin, 1941a; Mr. Curtin's quotation 1941). Even so, he was careful to portray a heroic battle for Australia's 'civilisation' and 'imperishable traditions' of 'decency' and 'dignity'. Curtin (1941a) spoke three times more about the ideals of 'freedom', 'liberty' and 'democracy' than Menzies in his war announcement (1939). Also Menzies focused on Britain as the 'mother country', seldom mentioning Australia, and his radio speech was more complex than the recommended level because it suited a twelfth-grade audience (1939, Day 2008; Lim 2003). Soon afterwards, Curtin used the popular genre of newsreels to look directly into the camera and say, 'we are face to face with the struggle for sheer existence' (Cinesound Productions 1941a). Rodgers (1971) recalled taking 'great trouble' to develop images of Curtin's 'straight-on appearance' because of a slight defect in his left eye. Although Curtin had been a fast-paced orator and spoke rapidly in off-the-record talks, he deliberately slowed to a calmer rhetorical pace and his Pacific war declaration was suited to a ninth-grade level (1941a; Batten 1945). He spoke 119.4 words a minute and his speech registered as 57.4 on the Flesch Reading Ease scale, close to the recommended levels. By comparison, Roosevelt broadcast his war declaration by radio and film and he spoke 86.6 words a minute, pausing during frequent applause. Roosevelt (1941a) also attempted to elicit citizens' involvement by asserting, 'we will defend ourselves to the uttermost' and '[w]ith confidence in our armed forces-with the unbounding determination of our people-we will gain the inevitable triumph'. Although Curtin (1941a) made fewer self-references than Roosevelt (1941a) and Menzies (1939) did in their war announcements, he attempted to create a memorable image of himself as an honest, straightforward leader, fighting with citizens for a common cause.

To persuade Australians to endorse his Pacific war leadership, Curtin cultivated journalists' support. Almost three weeks after his declaration of war, he wrote a *Herald* article to communicate his views that the Allies should fight Japan's military government with the same urgency as the Nazi battles. Curtin (1941b) wrote candidly**: '**Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.' While he rarely referred to himself, he often chose language about 'we', 'us' and 'our' and used nationhood terms to establish a rapport with the newspaper readers. For example, he asserted that 'Australian patriotism' and a 'sense of duty' were qualities that 'have been ever-present' in the country. At one of his off-the-record briefings, he told journalists that he was appealing for US military aid because Australia had been either 'deceived or deluded' about the lack of air defences in Singapore, a major British base that fell to Japan on 15 February 1942. The *Herald* Canberra bureau chief, Joseph Alexander, requested Curtin write the editorial on the outlook for Australia in 1942. Sir Keith Murdoch published this on the front page of one of the nation's most popular newspapers in the Saturday edition. Alexander (Papers, 28 December and 30 December 1941) noted in his diary that the editorial caused an 'immense sensation', adding 'The Sunday Telegraph pinched it and had it today. Other Sunday papers gave it great publicity and it is being widely discussed in England...KM [Keith Murdoch] is very amazed about it'. Most Australian, British and American journalists favourably portrayed Curtin's views on the need for more military assistance to fight Pacific battles (*Age*, *Canberra Times*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *West Australian*, 9, 28-30 December 1941, 16 March

1942). He elicited journalists' cooperation to self-censor contentious war news and signify he was communicating openly to citizens about his Pacific decisions.

While Roosevelt attempted to persuade the White House press to accept the 'beat Hitler first' strategy, his film and radio talks often appealed to the American public interest in retaliating against Japanese forces. After the Pearl Harbor bombing, the journalists' first questions focused on the Pacific war and Australian views of the region's instability (Roosevelt 1941c, 1941d, 1941e). Roosevelt led the media conversations back to the Nazi battles, stressing this was a 'common war effort' (1942e) and 'all-out effort' (1941c) that did not allow for 'the crime of disunity' (1942f). Speaking of Britain, he told the journalists, 'we certainly ought not to cut off our help that we have given to other Nations at this time' (1942e). Yet the American press reported on Australian government criticisms of the 'beat Hitler first' strategy as a 'catch call' and 'war cry', describing US military officials' 'impatience' with the 'comparative inaction' and 'passive theatre' in the Pacific (Army…1942; Aussie… 1942; Elson 1943; Rue 1942). *The New York Times* military editor, Hanson W. Baldwin (1942, p. 4), stated, 'we cannot fight a protracted delaying action in the Pacific. We must, it is felt, hit Japan continuously and without respite'. Sensitive to public opinion, Roosevelt used his newsreels to show that he shared 'the determination of our people' to strike back at the Pacific aggressors (British Pathé 1941). He used a punchy rhetorical style, repeating language of action, to assure moviegoers that Americans were fighting 'to hit our enemy and hit him again', and 'hitting hard in the far quarters of the Pacific' (British Pathé 1942a, 1942b). While he intended his film statements to be succinct and arresting during the 'shorts' before the feature movie, he developed patriotic imagery of drama and heroism in his radio talks, suited to most listeners' preference for entertaining stories (Tebbutt 2010). For example, he referred to the symbol of the American eagle 'flying high and striking hard' and recounted the story of wounded US servicemen escaping from the Java combat to Australia as acts of individual courage and endurance (1942b). From late 1942, he promoted military initiatives in his film and radio talks that 'inflicted heavy losses' on Japan (1942d, 1944; British Movietone News 1943; British Pathé 1943; Movietone 1943, 1944; Paramount News 1944). Since most American journalists did not oppose Roosevelt's endorsement of the 'beat Hitler first' strategy, his direct media messages signified to public audiences that he embodied national ideals to bring about a Pacific victory.

Curtin and Roosevelt used an expanded range of media broadcasts not only as vehicles of self-promotion, but as symbolising the relevance of their Pacific war leaderships to public audiences. By early 1942, reporters were describing Curtin's radio broadcasting as an 'armchair chat' and a 'fireside chat', resembling the media portrayal of Roosevelt's talks. Australian media began to accentuate the homespun imagery as Curtin broadcast to the recently opened 6KY station, advertised as 'the word of the people' in Perth, Western Australia, close to his family bungalow in suburban Cottesloe (The word of the people… 1941). According to the *Westralian Worker*, Curtin's speech on Wednesday at 9 p.m. appeared to be delivered as if he were 'thinking aloud from his armchair in his Cottesloe home, his thoughts being carried to his hearers by 6KY'. During the broadcast, he self-deprecatingly referred to himself as a 'a humble servant' ('Armchair chat' 1942, p. 3). Yet the comforting 'armchair' portrayal was inconsistent with Curtin's need to appear as a 'very approachable', energetic patriot (1941b; Rodgers 1971). After January 1942, the news references to the laidback 'armchair' imagery were replaced with messages of Curtin's direct 'talk' to citizens (e.g. *Advertiser*, *Argus*, *West Australian* 26 January 1942; *Advocate* 17 February 1942, p. 8; *Mercury* 3 October 1942, p. 15).

Journalists cooperated to show an accessible prime minister, promoting that the 'citizens'

journal', the *ABC Weekly*, was giving away a 'free gift' of Curtin's colour portrait in a special edition in June 1942 (Importance of 'A.B.C. Weekly' … 1942, p. 2.). A Perth *Sunday Times* reporter advised readers, 'You will want to hang this in your study' (A colour portrait … 1942). The picture showed Curtin looking slightly to the right, disguising his eye defect, with a caption that he had introduced the 'Advance Australia Fair' opening to Canberra radio statements (A.B.C. Weekly 1942). Rodgers (1971) said he had distributed 'hundreds and hundreds' of Curtin's picture. Also journalists contributed to the deception that any wartime Australian could find Curtin's name in the telephone book to converse with him because he enjoyed answering random calls to talk spontaneously with citizens (Batten 1945; Tremearne 1943). Likewise, Roosevelt attempted to convey the illusion of a close, direct relationship between his Pacific war leadership and Americans at home. In his newsreels, he used a pointing stick to indicate the distance between Australia and the South Pacific on a map and a similar image charted the offensive from Guadalcanal and New Guinea to Tokyo (British Pathé 1942b; Movietone 1944; Universal Studios 1941). He said in a radio talk: 'All of us must bear in mind the enormous size of the Pacific Ocean, the Pacific area, keeping a mental map of the world constantly in mind' (1944). To secure their access to Roosevelt's news conferences, the White House correspondents volunteered to self-censor the news of the slow progress in that war zone (1941c, 1941d, Sweeney 2001). By selecting familiar, accessible imagery, Curtin and Roosevelt encouraged media audiences to perceive the Pacific war as directly connected to their personal experiences.

While both leaders worked hard to appear as spontaneous, 'natural' communicators on film, they tried to hide their health problems from the public and depict a cinematic representation of their active war leaderships. The press agreed to tone down their news reports about Curtin's occasional admission to hospital and Roosevelt's polio. Due to censorship, wartime cinema audiences were unaware that Curtin was taken to a Sydney hospital soon after a 1942 newsreel and radio speech in Martin Place; similarly, listeners were not told that he delivered his major Washington broadcast from a Blair House guest's bed because he was too weak to walk outside during his US trip in 1944 (British Movietone News 1942-45; Curtin ill 1942; Ministers abroad 1944). Instead, filmmakers often portrayed Curtin and Roosevelt in eye-level, close-up shots as they were seated, leaning forward with their hands on the desk in front of them, to show they were honest, open leaders on an equal level as citizens (British Pathé 1942b, 1942c, 1943; Cinesound Productions 1941a; Cinesound Review & Movietone News 1941-45; National Film and Sound Archive 1944a; Universal Studios 1941). In fact, Curtin rehearsed and changed his speech and hand gestures in multiple directors' takes (National Film and Sound Archive Australia 1944a). For example, he worked with a US camera team to repeat his declaration of war against Japan, about a year and a half later, for Hollywood director Frank Capra's *Know Your Ally*. The film set was a practically empty Australian House of Representatives, but Speaker Walter Nairn donned the wig and gown to add authenticity to the story (Film…1943). Although Roosevelt's aides needed to lift him onto a platform and cover his wheelchair, he sometimes stood to deliver his filmed Pacific speeches, leaning forward into radio microphones and gripping the podium, to signify he was strong and determined (British Pathé 1941, 1942a; Movietone 1944; Paramount News 1944). Yet he favoured moving images of him in an open car, talking with US General MacArthur in Hawaii, visiting Battle of the Aleutian Islands veterans at Schofield Barracks, and, in Hickham airfield, meeting servicemen who had been wounded in Saipan (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum 1944; Movietone 1944; Paramount News 1944). Other film techniques conveyed the two leaders were close to the fighting action: a narrator talked of Roosevelt's '15-day trip to the Pacific battle zone' in Hawaii

and the Aleutian Islands; while Curtin's commentaries were often followed by images of combat scenes in his newsreels (British Movietone News 1942-45; Cinesound Productions & Cinesound Review 1941-45; Paramount News 1944).

As Curtin and Roosevelt used visual symbolism, rhetoric and camera techniques to show they shared common values as their public audiences, they portrayed their political opponents as deviating from national ideals. In a radio 'fireside chat', Roosevelt referred to isolationist Republican politicians as those who wanted 'the American eagle to imitate the tactics of the ostrich' as well as 'our national bird to be turned into a turtle' (1942b). Similarly, he denounced his opponents as 'a few bogus patriots', 'noisy traitors', 'betrayers of America' and 'would-be dictators' who have 'yielded to Hitlerism' (British Pathé 1942c). Curtin used his broadcasts to differentiate his leadership from the previous conservative administrations; in a Cinesound Productions newsreel (1941a), commentator Peter Bathurst used an authoritative tone to tell movie audiences: 'Right up to the outbreak of this colossal war, too many of our experts of our time depreciated the value of air power'. The seemingly 'objective' narration presented this political statement as factual and Curtin was shown to be the hero of the newsreel. Abandoning the distant 'armchat chat' imagery, he reframed the rhetoric to disparage his opponents. They became 'armchair critics', 'talkative armchair strategists' and 'faultfinders', portrayed as outsiders for attacking his decision to bring back more Australian troops from Nazi battles to strengthen the South-West Pacific defence (Australia must hold out … 1942, p. 2; Curtin censures … 1942, p. 3). He was also indirectly referring to Murdoch's editorial criticisms of his Pacific war strategies. Curtin's 'armchair critics' rhetoric appeared in other newspaper columns and readers' letters in support of his battle decisions (Creelman 1943; Opinion 1942; Topics…1942). Yet Curtin and Roosevelt avoided naming their detractors; likewise, they made impersonal references to 'the enemy' to persuade Japanese people to withdraw their support from their military government (Curtin 1941a, 1942, 1943, 1944a; Roosevelt 1941b, 1942a, 1942b, 1942c, 1942d, 1944). Whereas both leaders created intimate scenes to show their rapport with mass audiences, they often made harsh denunciations to marginalise their critics as jeopardising national security.

The war newsreels contributed to restructuring the social space of movie theatres for media audiences to view Curtin from an 'everyman' framework. Along with the 'lowering' effect of eye-level, close-up shots that seemed to bring the prime minister closer to the public, he often appeared in scenes to show he identified with the 'common man' (Movietone News 1941). For one film, he opened the front door of his Cottesloe bungalow, walked past his garden to his white picket fence and then strode along the footpath. This was 'just a home like so many others in the towns and cities of Australia', the unnamed narrator said (National Film and Sound Archive 1945). The scene generated spontaneous standing ovations from servicemen at an outdoor cinema near Darwin, indicating he was 'Australia personified' for many citizens (Day 2000, p. 65). His distinctively Australian speech contrasted with the ABC's traditional preference for an aristocratic 'Oxford accent;' however, he demanded the national station air more local voices that appealed to most listeners, who disliked the mimicry of BBC announcers (From vexed readers 1944, p. 6; Inglis 2006; Moses 1982; Tebbutt 2010). Consequently, the Australian Labor Party (1943a, 1943b) focused on his leadership popularity in an unprecedented way in 1943 election promotions; a newsreel portrayed him as the 'Man of the Hour' and a newspaper advertisement led with the slogan, 'Curtin Never Failed Australia', rarely mentioning local candidates. Despite this rhetoric, a poll clerk and voters were unable to identify Curtin as he tried to cast his ballot at his Cottesloe electorate on 21 August (Richards 1943). Even so, national and

international journalists helped to turn his image into a recognisable political brand, referring to him as 'Honest John' (Curtin and poll 1943; US awaits John Curtin 1944).

Curtin extended the nationhood symbols in his international news talks that were also targeted to Australians at home. In the first Australian prime minister's direct radio talk to American listeners, Curtin (1942) explained he was directing his talk to 'the people of America', particularly those 'fighting', 'sweating in factories and workshops' and 'making sacrifices'. Also he referred to heroic, popular images of Australians by saying, 'we are the Anzac breed. Our men stormed Gallipoli; they swept through the Libyan desert; they were the 'rats' of Tobruk'. His talk was broadcast to about 700 US radio stations, as well as throughout Britain, Canada, South America and Europe, and received positive news coverage in Australian, British and US newspapers (Australia…1942; Dr Evatt's…1942; Last bastion 1942; Pledge…1942). Some months later, Roosevelt announced to the media that he had invited Curtin to the White House (American Newsreel 1942). Curtin did not make this journey until 1944, when the Allies were securing the offensive against Japan. Differing from Menzies, he allowed newsreel teams to accompany him throughout his trip and film his unusually unguarded exchanges with journalists as well as servicemen and women in England, Canada and the US (British Movietone News 1942-45; Martin & Hardy 1993; Moody 1944; Movietone News 1944; National Film and Sound Archive 1944b). Contrasting with many politicians, Curtin's face was not masked by a hat in newsreels and this contributed to his reputation for being open and straightforward (British Movietone News 1942-45; Cinesound Review & Movietone News 1941-45).

Before Curtin's London trip, the federal government had opened a radio-telegraph channel to allow journalists to relay British news more quickly to audiences at home; this was well-timed for the prime minister to generate inclusive political messages for Australians (New press radio channel 1944). At a London broadcast news interview, a journalist asked Curtin if Australia should participate in peace talks with Japan. The press reported his answer differently for specific audiences. A British tabloid emphasised he responded bluntly by saying: 'As the Australian bushman would say, "My oath!"' (Wood 1944). At home, Australia's *Army News* propagandists broadened his message to imply his words resonated with a national audience as they quoted him as replying, 'To use a good old Australianism, my oath' ('My Oath…1944). Deprecating personal power, Curtin declared with a smile that he was a 'printer's devil', or newspaper apprentice, during a filmed speech in Guildhall, generating good-natured laughter; he added, 'I, of course, like many others of my fellow countrymen and countrywomen, have had what has been described as humble origins' (British Pathé 1944). In a radio talk from the BBC's London studio, he praised 'our British way of life' in Australia that subscribed to 'the same ideas and ideals' including 'liberty', 'civilisation', 'gallantry', and fair play in cricket (1944a). He selected his rhetoric to appeal to Australians' sense of affinity for Britain; these messages encouraged Australians to identify with Curtin and visualise themselves in the pictured echelons of power as part of his government's strategy to develop televised political news as a way of 'bringing parliament closer to the people' (Parliamentary Papers 1945).

It was more difficult for Roosevelt to link with the 'everyman' theme, given his privileged background and youthful attitude of superiority; however, with his polio diagnosis and increasing trips to rural Georgia for health treatments in the 1920s, he developed more understanding of the problems confronting struggling farmers, small businesses and workers (Gallagher 1996). Although he had been viewed as part of an affluent leisure class, he rejected on film the Axis propaganda that he was leading a nation of 'playboys' just as he had overturned this image of himself as being weak (British Pathé 1942b). While he could not walk among the

servicemen, as Curtin did, he used other devices to symbolise his egalitarian relationships with American workers. He rolled up his shirt sleeves to signify he was working as hard as other Americans, for example, when he announced the Allies were 'taking the initiative' in New Guinea and the Aleutian Islands in a newsreel. Looking directly into the camera and placing his arms on the table, he announced, 'We shall not settle for less than total victory' (British Pathé 1943). In some of his Pacific newsreels, he interacted closely with injured military hospital patients and other wounded servicemen to convey his humanity (British Pathé 1942a; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum 1944). Returning from his trip to Hawaii and the Aleutian Islands in August 1944, he gave an 'informal summary' of his travels to several thousand shipyard workers and sailors at the Puget Sound Navy Shipyard in Bremerton, Washington (1944; Movietone 1944; Paramount News 1944). His speech, which was broadcast and filmed as he talked from the slanted forecastle deck of the *Cummings*, generated positive press coverage in Australian and US newspapers (e.g. Trusteeship…1944; US plans…1944). These media messages symbolised his unity with the service personnel and labourers, encouraging Americans to feel a part of his governance during the Pacific war.

The funerals of Curtin and Roosevelt led to the most extensive media mass mourning in their nations' histories at the time because many Australians and Americans felt they had personally known their countries' leaders. The breaking headlines about their deaths, as the 'newsboys' shouted these in street corners, shocked city workers because journalists had agreed to reassure people that they would recover from their health struggles. After Roosevelt died in his health spa resort in Warm Springs, Georgia on 12 April 1945, American radio provided the longest coverage of one news story at the time. Thousands of people tried to enter a Hollywood studio to listen to movie and radio stars' tributes for two hours (Free…1945; Mr. Roosevelt…1945). After Curtin died from a heart condition on 5 July 1945, journalists published workers' reactions about the loss of the prime minister, differing from the news coverage of Lyons' death in office on 7 April 1939. Whereas the press had often focused on 'prominent people' giving tribute to Lyons, the Australian newspapers featured the messages of 'ordinary people' over Curtin's death (*Canberra Times*, 7 April-16 April 1939; Messages…1945, p. 2; Tributes to great leadership 1939, p. 15; World joins…1945, p. 1). Similarly to the Australian press, the *New York Times* had published understated news reports about Curtin's health; however, the newsreel and radio teams had cooperated to convey public representations of his dynamic war leadership (15 August, 5 November, 5 December 1944; 30 April, 14 June, 3 July 1945). This was the first time that Australian journalists, photographers and camera crews travelled to report on a WA funeral; in another media first, the service was broadcast across the nation (Australian Prime Minister's Department 1945). This type of news coverage was a precursor to the funeral media events increasingly held in the twentieth century to unite communities around a leader's symbolic embodiment of shared values.

The frequency of their radio and filmed news, the mainly positive press coverage, the reactions of their media publics and polls suggest that Curtin and Roosevelt succeeded in generating the façade of close interactions with citizens about the Pacific war (Lloyd 1988; Steele 1985; Curtin and Poll 1943). As well as expanding filmed political news about the national leader, Curtin gave about 12 major prime ministerial broadcasts each year and Roosevelt delivered an average of nine presidential radio talks a year (Curtin 1941-45; Lim 2003). Journalists generally reproduced their media talks favourably in the news and largely supported their Pacific war strategies (*Age*, *Canberra Times*, *New York Times*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Washington Post*, *West Australian*, 1941-1945).; Steele 1974, 1985). Of this study's sample, Curtin targeted his radio talks to an

average tenth-grade reading level (1941a, 1942, 1943, 1944a), similar to the average audience for Roosevelt's Pacific-oriented 'fireside chats' (1941b, 1942b, 1942c, 1942d). In comparison, Menzies had improved his mass broadcasting language by 1942. Although he selectively targeted middle-class listeners, he aimed to deliver more appealing media messages to his audiences and his words were increasingly appropriate for a ninth-grade level. Even so, his last election speeches indicated he still occasionally spoke at a higher level suited to an eleventh-grade reading standard (1961, 1963). The Flesch Reading Ease score for the selected Curtin broadcasts was 54.375 and it was 57.5 for all of Roosevelt's 'fireside chats;' both scores were slightly more complicated than the recommended levels, but not beyond the comprehension of working-class listeners (Curtin 1941a, 1942, 1943, 1944a).

Among the available broadcasts, Curtin spoke an average 139.6 words a minute (1941a, 1942, 1943), somewhat faster than Roosevelt's pace of 105 to 117 words a minute in his 'chats' (Bradenburg & Braden 1958; Lim 2003). Yet according to *The Age*, Australian radio listeners enjoyed Curtin's 'periodical talks to the nation' because they liked to 'hear his voice, weigh his words and generally maintain that personal contact with the head of the Government which is eminently desirable' (The steersman…1945). Moreover, Curtin's use of Australian speech influenced the news delivery as more reporters advocated abandoning the 'Oxford accent' imitations (Auster 1942, p. 6). Roosevelt's name also became a 'household word' to Australians, who developed a 'personal devotion to him' that was 'rarely given by a people to any statesman other than their own' (Eggleston 1945). By January 1942, Roosevelt's US public approval rating was 84 per cent, according to the Gallup poll. Another survey found 73 per cent of respondents approved his handling of foreign policy in May 1943 (Gallup, 1972). The next year he was elected to an unprecedented fourth presidential term. In Australian surveys, about 80 per cent of voters endorsed the prime minister (Curtin and poll 1943; Mr. Curtin's job…1942). Media analysts credited him for achieving the Australian Labor Party's greatest election victory at the time in 1943 because of his 'prestige' and 'popularity' (Canberra Commentary 1943; Whitington 1943). These types of polls and media coverage indicated the leaders engaged more citizen support.

Conclusion

Curtin and Roosevelt developed political communication to create the semblance of a closer relationship between the nation's leader and citizens, not because of their 'exceptional' individual traits, but largely due to their expanded use of the media. Through the development of symbolism, inclusive language, camera techniques and news conferences, they used the 'specific language of the media' to evoke messages of trust about their ability to help achieve a Pacific victory. They mainly adopted these techniques to win electorally and, more so than their predecessors, they focused on their cultivated leadership images in campaigns instead of the political parties that they represented. While they contributed to the manipulation of broadcast messages, film camera rituals and media politics, they increased the national leader's communications to citizens in clear, accessible terms. As they talked about their Pacific war strategies in the media, they gave more public glimpses of the nation's highest office and made this seem more open to citizens. This study found that Curtin aimed his prime ministerial radio broadcasts at a tenth-grade level; although he spoke more quickly than recommended levels, his media scripts were suited to mass listeners and were similar to Roosevelt's Pacific-oriented 'fireside chats' in terms of the reading ease. They generated mainly favourable news coverage as they promoted symbolism, camera imagery and rhetoric of their active participation in the

Pacific offensive. Even more so than Roosevelt, Curtin initiated techniques to communicate with journalists, giving them more access to governmental decision-making and supporting the role of political news reporting to elicit their cooperation in the suppression of contentious war news.

While the political use of the media has developed unevenly since the Curtin and Roosevelt administrations, more national leaders have become willing to use broadcast news, interviews and the relatively new media of the era to communicate with journalists and citizens. The techniques of Curtin and Roosevelt are still useful for researchers when evaluating political leaders' efforts to create symbolic messages of trust and engage media audiences. Curtin and Roosevelt were mainly successful in expressing a public persona by communicating frequently with journalists, who contributed to the media symbolism that they were developing clear, meaningful and direct dialogues with public audiences about shared values, goals and crisis solutions. Although they benefited from censorship, they developed innovative media communications to convey that the national leadership and government no longer seemed as distant and disconnected from people's lives.

Endnotes

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[2] The same newsreel images were shown in US theatres.

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