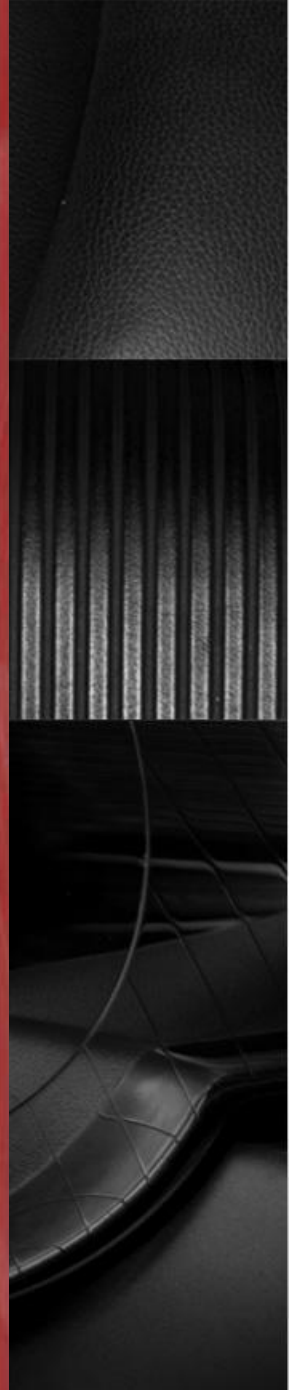# Crisis Communications and the Burnt Black Box

Media, Audience, & Power in Christchurch, New Zealand

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How a natural disaster helped ANT make sense

- Punctualization / Black-boxing

   Punctualization = complexities of networks become invisible and irrelevant, masked by a seemingly simple exterior, or 'black box'

   (Law, 1992)

Conducted online, September 2011

Self-selecting sample

- 349 respondents (73% female)

- Age range 18-80+ (62% 35-59)

- Similar ethnic mix to wider Chch population

- Different city suburbs & surrounding towns well represented

Helpful/very helpful on Feb 22
 - Radio (68%)
 - Word of mouth (60%)
 - Texting (54%)

Tech difficulties on Feb 22
  - Mobile phone: calling (77%)
  - Mobile:phone texting (60%)
  - Charging mobile phone (70%)

Survey

"I found that on February 22nd my best means of communication was to talk with my daughter who lives in Melbourne on my cell phone. She then rang other family members to check on them and rang me back to let me know how they were. Texting was erratic."

How a natural disaster helped ANT make sense

- Fluid and Fire (ANTa)

    Not all networks keep their shape in changing times.
    A time of fluidity brings gradual change whereas fire involves sudden, discontinuous movements.
    (Law & Mol, 2001)

    Fire space involves an awareness of varieties, alternatives and disconnections. *(Elovaara, 2007)*
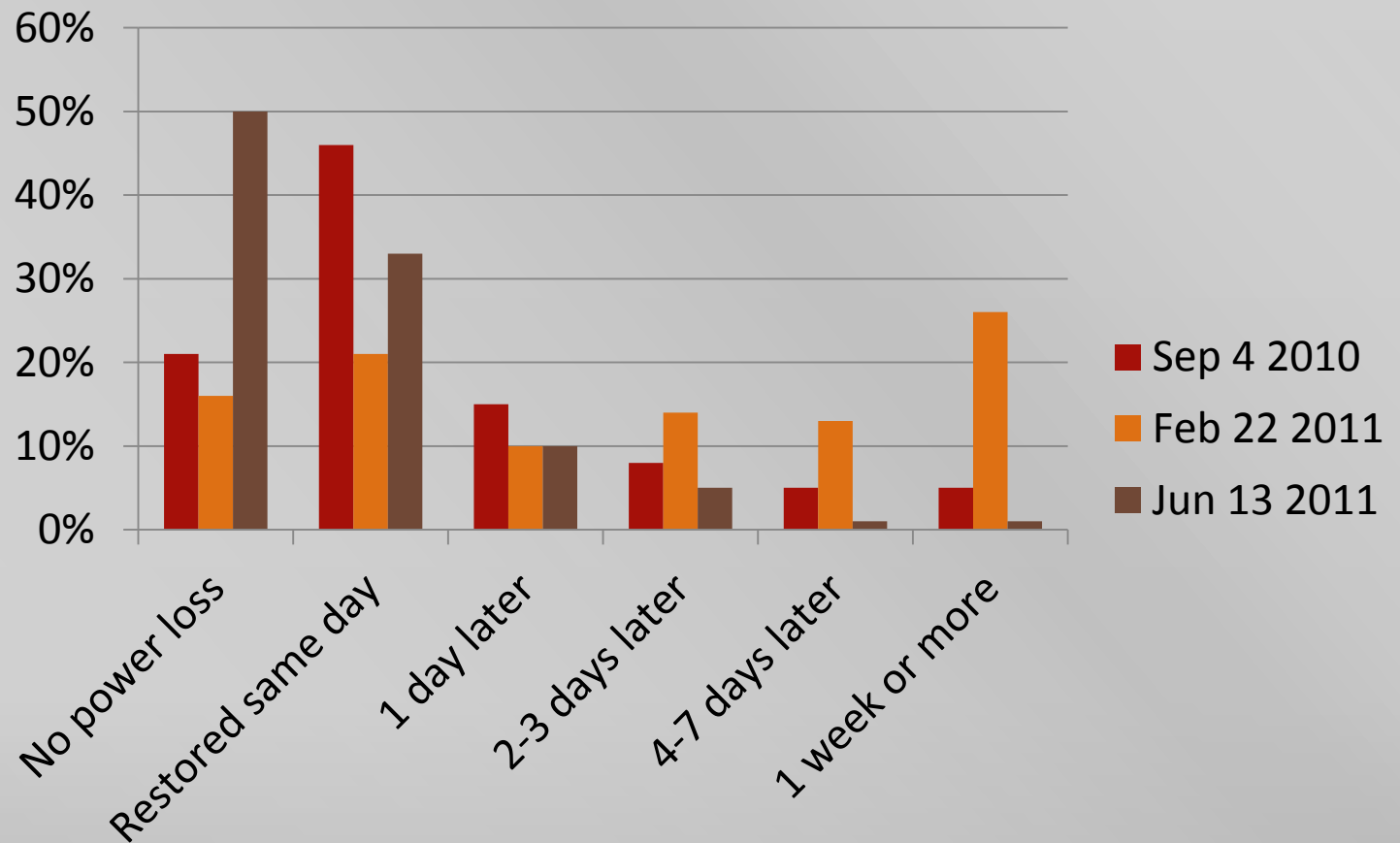
"[We received information] *through friends who were living in Wellington who had access to the internet and were ringing us every day*"

"*Since I was staying where there was a TV I was able to return home and convey information to others who had no electricity*"

Power loss in 3 major earthquake events

Christchurch earthquake
Approximate areas without power
at 3pm Friday 4/03/2011

Please note: this map is a rough approximation only, and should not be relied upon when assessing the electrical safety of any premises.
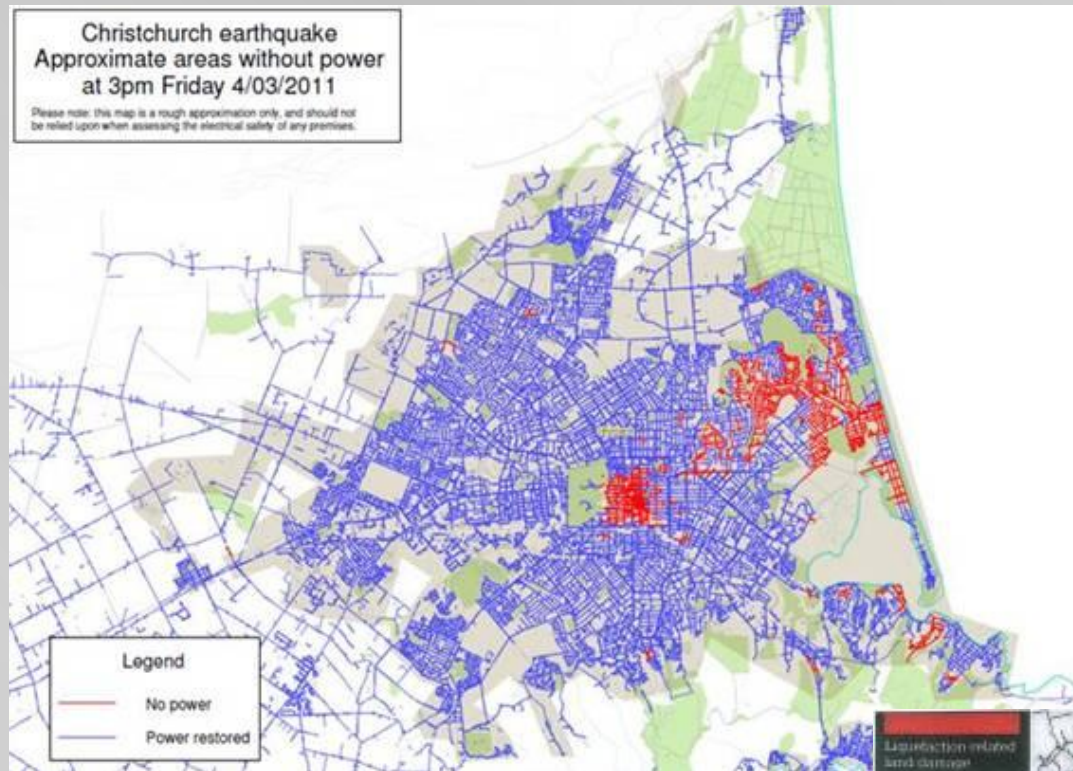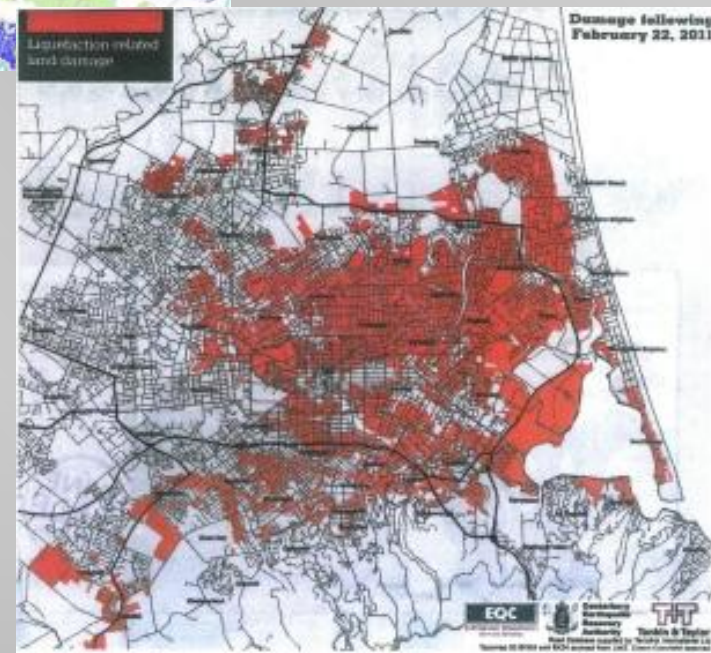
Legend
— No power
— Power restored

Image: Federated Farmers

*Image:
EQC/CERA/Tonkin & Taylor*

Radio

"Battery powered radio!!! fabulous! Sat with a group of people Feb 22nd huddled by a transistor radio to hear news"

"Radio stations [were useful]*, however they suggested looking at websites for* [water] *delivery times and we didn't have power so this was frustrating"*

Newspaper

"The Press was wonderful, it was impressive how they managed to carry on after all the disruption"

"The best material for getting info about inside the CBD was by far the Press (photos etc)"

"The Press was very good at giving suburb-specific information"

Newspaper

"Newspapers were good for bus and service info to a certain extent, but I got frustrated at their sensationalism of earthquake science"

"The newspaper has printed some interesting information about what's been going on but a lot of scaremongering as well"

Newspaper

"The papers were sold out too fast for us to get to read any"

"Access to newspapers [was a problem], *as there were no shops open in our area"*

Print

"The community noticeboard with updates regularly posted - at South New Brighton primary school and also in Redcliffs and Sumner. I'm not sure if all suburbs and neighbourhoods had this"

"Signs written on power poles and fences, mostly hand made and using spray paint and cardboard"

TV

"The TV stations could have used part of their broadcasting time to provide useful information rather than continually showing us images of the damage to the city"

"Too much time spent on the inner city and televising that... There are [only] *so many times you can see a destroyed church without switching off or tuning out"*
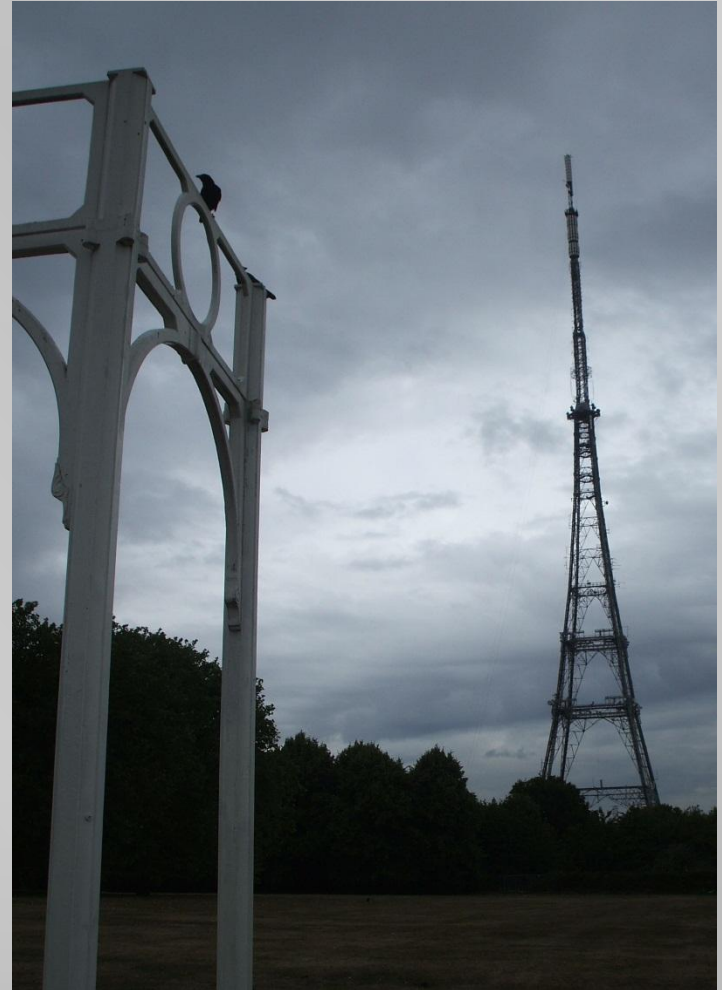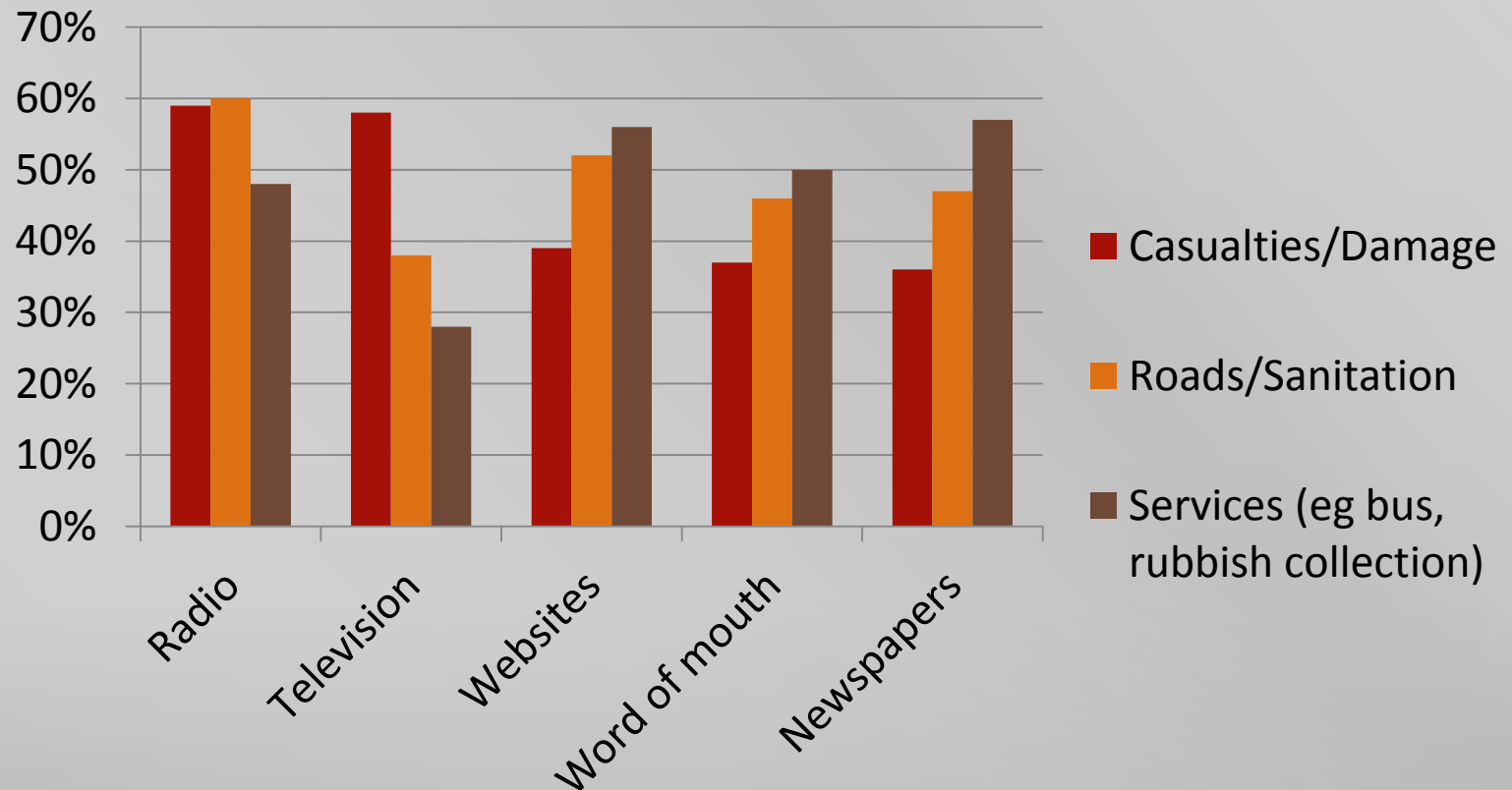
Media convergence and the black box

- The Black Box Fallacy

Media is shaped by the competing and conflicting influences of both culture and technology, and is unlikely to result in a single, magical black box.
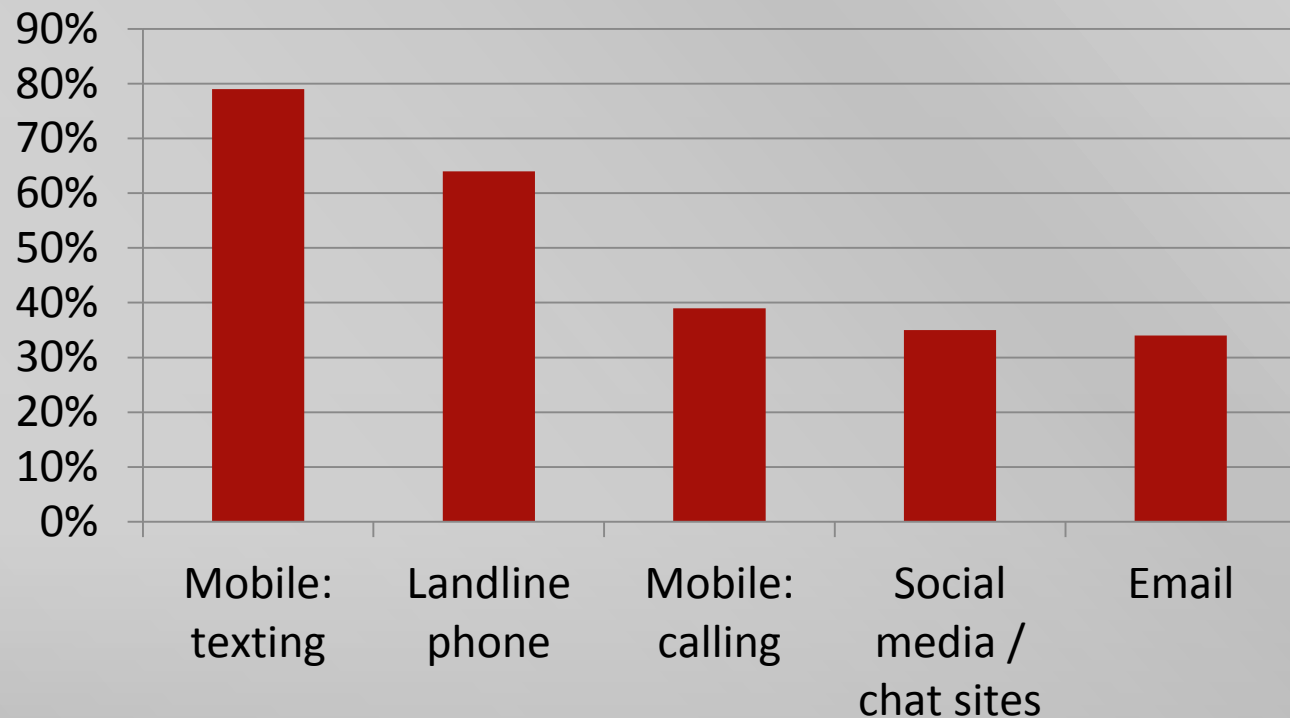
(Jenkins, 2008)

Media use & communication methods

Media use & communication methods

Keeping in touch - friends & family

Help Christchurch people stay in touch
Many people in the city have experienced a loss of power, and if they have a modern cordless phone - which needs power to run - they won't be able to make calls.
New Zealanders have donated almost 10,000 of the older, analogue phones that just plug straight into the wall jackpoint and don't need power to run.
We now have enough to satisfy the demand so thank you to everyone who donated a phone.
If you are without power and need one of these devices they are being distributed through our Telecom Store and Telecom Connect Hub locations in Christchurch.

Thanks
The Team @ Telecom

www.telecom.co.nz/earthquakephones

New media and crisis

www.useless.com

"In Eastern side of city [we] *needed printed notices placed around the area. All the information at www. was useless"*

"[We needed] *notices regarding specific areas posted publically in those areas and updated regularly - too much emphasis on internet which isn't helpful if you have no power"*

www.useless.com

"Cater for people who do not have access to the internet (particularly the elderly)"

"More info via traditional news sources... for those people who don't have access to technology, either as personal choice (eg age vs new fangled technology bias) or because power outages etc made it unavailable"

So what does it all mean?

- One size does not fit all

- Plan for the unexpected

- Look for network breaks

How ANT helped a natural disaster make sense

In times of fire,
      black boxes
            get burnt.

Questions?