

Blogging and Ofcom: dialogue in the public sphere

The emergence of a new regulator– an amalgamation of several ‘legacy’ regulators– to oversee the entire communications industry brought about a challenge for those seeking to make their views heard. Expressed commitments to ‘citizen’ and ‘consumer’ representation, and the establishment of two panels within the regulator to attend to the needs of the public, suggest that a new style of governance has arrived. In response, and due to their limited resources, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) have reduced their level of involvement with the regulator. This paper asks whether the promise of a Habermasian public sphere, where conflicts of interest can be articulated and resolved has emerged. To do this, we explore how one particular dialogue has emerged between the regulator and some bloggers who have established OfcomWatch as an internet-based exploration of Ofcom’s work. We ask if this endeavour constitutes the form of ‘distributed leadership’ that some scholars suggest is a product of new information technologies. OfcomWatch’s own observations of the ways in which the regulator deals with public concerns are described in this paper, alongside extracts from interviews with the bloggers who make them. Drawing on critical discursive approaches, we analyse the ways in which OfcomWatch formulates itself in relation to the regulator, and provide an account of the way in which its techniques of expression highlight dilemmas in contemporary governance.