

**Digital Songlines: the adaption of modern  
communication technology at Yuendumu, a  
remote Aboriginal Community in Central  
Australia**

by

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**WARNING:** This work contains the names of people who may have passed away since the time of writing.

## **ABSTRACT**

During the early 1980s the Warlpiri at Yuendumu, a remote Aboriginal community in Central Australia, began their own experiments in local television and radio production. This was prior to the launch of the AUSSAT satellite in 1985 which brought broadcast television and radio to remote Australia for the first time. There was concern amongst remote Aboriginal communities, as well as policy makers, that the imposition of mass media without consultation could result in permanent damage to Aboriginal culture and language. As a result, a policy review 'Out of the Silent Land' was published in 1985 and from that developed the Broadcasting in Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) which allowed communities to receive radio and television from the satellite. BRACS also provided the option to turn off mainstream media and insert locally produced material.

This study of the Warlpiri at Yuendumu has found that, since the original experiments, they have enthusiastically used modern communication technology including radio, video making, locally produced television, and, more recently, on-line services. The Warlpiri have adapted rather than adopted the new technology. That is they have used modern communications technology within existing cultural patterns to strengthen their language and culture rather than to replace traditional practices and social structures. The Warlpiri Media Association has inspired other remote broadcasters and is now one of eight remote media networks that link to form a national network via the National Indigenous Media Association of Australia.

The Warlpiri have actively adapted modern communication technology because it is to their advantage. The new technology has been used to preserve culture and language, to restore, and possibly improve, traditional communications and to provide employment and other opportunities for earning income. It appeals to all age groups, especially the elders who have retained control over broadcasts and it also provides entertainment.

## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABT	Australian Broadcasting Tribunal
AFI	Australian Film Institute
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AUSSAT	The Australian telecommunication satellite
BRACS	Broadcasting in Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme
BRS	BRACS Revitalisation Strategy
CAAMA	Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CDEP	Community Development Employment Fund
CLC	Central Land Council
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DETYA	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DRCS	Digital Radio Concentrator System
DVD	Digital Video Disc
EVTV	Ernabella Video Television
HF Shower	High Frequency Radio Shower
ICA	Indigenous Communications Australia
ICAM	Indigenous Cultural Affairs Magazine
NIMAA	National Indigenous Media Association of Australia
NIRS	National Indigenous Radio Service
NLC	Northern Land Council
PC	Productivity Commission
RCTS	Remote Commercial Television Service
RTIF	Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund
RUCS	Remote and Underserved Community Scheme
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
TAIMA	Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Media Association
TAPE	The Aboriginal Program Exchange
TEABBA	Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasting Association
UHF	Ultra High Frequency
VHF	Very High Frequency
WAAMA	Western Australia Aboriginal Media Association
WMA	Warlpiri Media Association

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