

**Burgess, Jean**, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

**Remembering Black Saturday: The Role of Personal Communicative Ecologies in the Mediation of the 2009 Australian Bushfires**

On and around Saturday 7 February 2009, a series of bushfires in the Australian state of Victoria resulted in Australia's highest ever loss of human life resulting from a bushfire, and the obliteration of entire towns. As with previous natural disasters, millions of Australian citizens witnessed and made sense of these events via a range of media and communication channels – via television news coverage, radio updates, or phone calls to friends. In the case of the 2009 bushfires, however, the emergence of new ‘communicative ecologies’ (combining the mainstream press, government information and citizens’ communication via online social networks and word-of-mouth) played an important role not only in the success or failure of emergency communication (resulting in the saving or the loss of lives), but also in public discussion, public empathy and fundraising, and the sharing of trauma narratives.

This paper will discuss the findings of a small-scale qualitative survey of Australian citizens which sought to produce a retrospective map of the mix of media and communication channels through which the news, personal narratives and emotional aftermath of the 2009 Victorian bushfires were experienced, mediated, and shared. I discuss not only what this exercise revealed about how the bushfires were ‘actually’ mediated, but also how the passage of time has revealed what forms of mediation and remediation are most resonant and entangled with the folding of the bushfire, as an ‘event’, into narratives of personal and public memory.