**FACULTY OF ART, DESIGN AND HUMANITIES**

**MA in Humanities by Independent Study**

# "Documentary Film in International Development"

## Module 3: Technology and the rise of "UGC".

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## Introduction

We have seen how technology has been at the forefront of driving new practices in documentary filmmaking. In my previous essay for this project (Johnstone, 2012d), while focusing on UNTV, I looked at how the BBC used new the new Hi-8 video format (designed for the domestic home-movie market), to deliver its ground breaking series *Video Diaries* in which members of the public filmed and created personal stories for public broadcast. The BBC's approach inspired other organisations to adopt similar production strategies. UNTV was among the first to do so with their *Video Letters* series, produced in Zagreb during the war in the Former Yugoslavia between 1993-1995. In both of these television projects, non-professional authors became the content creators. The traditional barriers between the media producers and the audience had begun to be blurred.

Adopting and adapting new technology has been a feature of documentary filmmaking from the outset. This essay examines the relationship between the documentary film maker and technology, arguing that technology has always had a critical role in not only shaping the way in which documentary film has been made in the past, but that technology continues to shape approaches and methodologies in film and television today. However, whereas in the past the major beneficiaries of these technological advances have been professional documentary filmmakers, the most notable beneficiaries of the recent technological advancements have been amateur filmmakers, including users in developing societies.  This essay looks at the links between technology and documentary film and examines how new technology is driving changes in both production and distribution, with particular reference to engaging audiences in developing countries. I will also look at the ethical issues that

this raises for filmmakers focusing on communities in developing countries, or developing communities within the framework of developed countries[1].

For the purposes of this short study, when referring to ‘developing countries’ or the ‘global south’ I have confined my research principally to the African context, with one reference to Digital Green (Shah and Joshi, 2010), a project in India.

**Documentary film and technology – a whistle-stop tour**

Documentary filmmaking has had a long association with cutting edge technology. Since the very early days of film production in the 1880s, documentary filmmakers[2] have seized upon the latest incarnation of the film or video camera to create their content, to tell stories and to educate. But up until the 1960s it is arguable that it was film itself that was the technological wonder, capturing action and recording events like never before. Film cameras, miraculous though they were, were big and bulky 35mm machines[3], and although Eastman Kodak introduced a 16mm film stock in 1923, it was not until 1960, argues Chang, that reliable, silent handheld 16mm film cameras[4], faster film stock[5] and improved microphones combined with the portable Swiss Nagra crystal sync audio recorder that the documentary filmmaker was empowered to capture scenes on the fly as they unfolded with live location sound

[1] Such as the black community in America in the 1950s and 1960s.

[2] The term ‘documentary’ is credited to the pioneering filmmaker John Grierson in his film review of Robert Flaherty’s *Moana* in 1926 *(Aufderheide, 2007, p. 33)*. However, the terms is now retrospectively applied to those filmmakers engaged in most non-fiction filmmaking pre-Grierson.

[3] See Cousins and MacDonald’s quite excellent interview with filmmaker Basil Wright who worked with John Grierson at the Empire Marketing Board, in which he talks about using the Newman Sinclair cameras and hefty tripods to shoot *Song of Ceylon* (1934). The smallest camera they had was a 35mm Eyemo. (Cousins and Macdonald, 2006, p. 105)

[4] According to Chang (2011), two film cameras were coincidentally developed at the same time around 1960. In France, Éclair produced a brand new machine with a revolutionary silent claw mechanism for advancing the film, while in America, *Life* journalist Robert Drew oversaw the modification of the Auricon camera to achieve the same results .

[5] Film stock that was more light sensitive enabled filmmakers to work in low-light situations without lamps.

(Chang, 2011). This new technology was pioneered by filmmakers like Richard Leacock and Jean Rouch (Carter, 2011)[6]. As Aufderheide points out:

> "Practices set in motion by the legendary trio of documentary founders [Robert Flaherty, John Grierson and Dziga Vertov] were profoundly shaken up in the 1960s revolution that was variously called cinema verité, observational cinema and direct cinema." (Aufderheide, 2007, p. 44)

In building sets, using actors and recreating scenes, Flaherty and Grierson adapted the available technology pioneered by early feature filmmakers to create their ground breaking documentary films. These adapted approaches were adopted mostly because there was no practical way of recording sound on location (Holland, 2000, p. 152) prior to the introduction of the Nagra in the 1960s. Although Flaherty and Grierson have largely been credited for their contributions to development of the documentary form, they should also be regarded as technological pioneers in their own right. Richard Leacock, who worked with Flaherty on *Louisiana Story* (Flaherty, 1948) and went one to become a leading light in the documentary 'direct cinema' revolution of the 1960s is clear that Flaherty was pushing the limits of the technology that he had available to him. In an essay on his blog, Leacock wrote:

> "In the case of Nanook of the North (1921) and Moana (1925) the 35mm cameras had to be hand cranked and therefore had to be mounted on solid tripods. Panning and tilting was not easy when you were simultaneously hand cranking… Flaherty was working, like the rest of us, with the technology available to him, as best he could, that is, he always used the smallest, most portable systems he could find. In Louisiana, to the horror of professional film

[6] Carter's article focuses on and summarises the main story in the BBC film by Mandy Chang, *The Camera that Changed the World* (Chang, 2011).

> makers, we used the new Arreflex [sic.] cameras "liberated" from the German Wehrmacht!" (Leacock)

But of the three 'documentary founders' Dziga Vertov was the technological master innovator as Cousin and MacDonald point out:

> "Watching Vertov's films today what is most impressive is their no-holds-barred willingness to explore every technical capability the cinema had at its disposal. Vertov and his Kinoks did everything and anything." (Cousins and Macdonald, 2006, p. 52)

Leacock and Rouch, armed with the new mobile filmmaking technology, then inspired a generation of filmmakers and pioneered technical approaches that are still regularly adopted today in what the television industry refers to as the 'observational documentary', shot on handheld, affordable High Definition (HD) cameras[7]. These mobile lightweight video cameras are the current equivalent of the 16mm cameras that emerged in the 1960s. Just as documentary filmmakers, previously bogged down in a mire of cumbersome 35mm technology before the 1960s, found they were liberated by the new technology that Leacock and Rouch pioneered, so filmmakers in the in the last decade to 2013 have been liberated by new technology. Small, compact and cheap to own and operate, the new generation of HD video cameras that has emerged (including many photography cameras that shoot astonishing HD video images) has once again freed up filmmakers from bloated production methodologies that television production had adopted, as 16mm film was phased out in favour of video in the 1980 and 1990s. The large TV and news crews described by Bell (Bell, 1996) are increasingly being replaced by mobile one-man, self-shooting

[7] Cameras such as the Panasonic HPX250 and the Canon XF305 are now ubiquitous on current observational documentary projects. Both of the systems have been approved by the EBU for broadcast production. (EBU, 2012)

producer-directors, using lightweight, technically outstanding shooting kits[8] (Gaunt, 2008).

However, while the professional filmmaker has benefited from these new technologies that enable better access to subjects, greater freedom of movement and all the benefits of extraordinary picture quality, perhaps the most interesting revolution is how this new technology has opened the door to a new breed of content creator from communities across many levels of social development, authors that were formerly part of "the audience".

**User-Generated Content**

As I have argued previously (Johnstone, 2012d), the BBC was one of the earlier adopters of the latest high quality video technology, developing the *Video Nation* project and the *Video Diaries* TV series, which relied on audience inputs or, what has come to be referred to by scholars and the media as "user-generated content" (UGC) (Williams et al., 2011; van Dijck, 2009) as part of the production process (BBC, 2012).

The increased use of UGC has broken down and even started to redefine the boundaries between the media, the traditional content producers and the audience. Media scholars have argued that relationship between the medium (be it film or television) and the audience has never been wholly passive in the way that it is consumed (van Dijck, 2009, p. 43), but UGC has now given the audience an active role in the creation of broadcast media content and this is driving change in

[8] On my most recent film for BBC *Inside Out*, I worked as Self-Shooting Producer Director. I also edited the film and did the voiceover (Johnstone, 2012c).

documentary production. Since its early adoption in the 1990s, UGC is now well established in modern production workflows. News broadcasts on all the main UK television networks are regularly peppered with “amateur footage”, and indeed, whole documentary programmes are now devoted to assembling this material to deliver a more personal account of an event, such as Channel 4’s *Caught on Camera* which documents “the moving true story of the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami told through the experiences of those who were actually there” (Sutherland, 2009) and *Japan’s Tsunami: Caught on Camera* (Nicholson, 2011). The “diary cam” is also a popular tool in many documentary projects, all too often switched on, last thing at night, to record the subject’s final thoughts on the day’s activities before going to bed (Gaunt, 2008). This device has found its way to mainstream cinema, most notably in Danny Boyle’s *127 Hours* (Boyle, 2010).

But while UGC might be a godsend, either as a stylised technical device for storytelling in a feature film or as a source of content for the news networks, the new technology does pose a significant threat to journalists and filmmakers who have traditionally relied on their skills, craft and knowledge to deliver documentary content and earn them a living. While Leacock and Rouch may have been mavericks on the margins of the mainstream film fraternity when they started to revolutionise documentary film in the 1960s, they would at least have expected to earn a living from their work. However, the new equipment that inspired dramatic changes in documentary production techniques in the 1960s was available only to a privileged few. Robert Drew needed a budget of one hundred thousand US Dollars from *Life* to develop the first silent 16mm cameras on *Primary* (Chang, 2011). Furthermore, these users were skilled, trained filmmakers. The new video equipment revolution that started in the 1990s has not only produced cheap equipment for professional

filmmakers, but has also catered for the growing amateur market, providing low-cost, high-quality technology that has democratised filmmaking.

Although filmmakers have also benefited from the access to cheap production technology (Fraser (2012) argues that there has been an explosion in documentary filmmaking as a result of new technology), the technology itself has eroded the filmmaker's ability to rely on his or her technical expertise to make them a living. With news organisations now accepting content from amateur filmmakers for inclusion on websites and in programming, often for free, the need to pay professional filmmakers for content is reduced, thereby reducing the demand for the content from independent producers[9]. There has also been a shift in the way that content is consumed and, as Keen (Keen, 2008) notes, in the weight given by many younger consumers to professionally produced content. Keen points out that:

> "The cacophony of anonymous blogs and user-generated content is deafening today's youth to the voices of informed experts and professional journalists; kids are so busy self-broadcasting themselves on social networks that they no longer consume the creative work of professional musicians, novelists or filmmakers." (Keen, 2008)

The availability of free content, combined with a saturated market place full of media graduates[10], the current economic climate[11] and the dramatic increase in the number of TV channels which dilutes revenues for TV advertising, has all combined

[9] The BBC regularly request content (including photo and video) from their web audiences for inclusion in other reports. As an example see: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-20922038

[10] Although I have not found a specific citation for the claim that there are too many Media graduates, for not enough jobs, there have been numerous articles in the press citing this issue including a piece by Polly Curtis (Curtis, 2008). There is anecdotal evidence for the supply of media graduates outstripping demand here http://graduatefog.co.uk/2010/1001/too-many-media-graduates/

[11] I am referring her to the global economic recession that began with the banking crash of 2008/9 and persists at the time of writing.

to create a perfect storm for independent filmmakers, journalists and media professionals, a storm that Hollifield and Becker refer to as “hypercompetition” (Hollifield and Becker, 2009). With widespread job cuts in the broadcast television industry (Sweney, 2011) and lower budgets for content production squeezing independent filmmakers and production companies, many are now seeking alternate sources for programme funding outside television, such as cinema distribution (Gaunt, 2008), video-on-demand distribution and crowd-funding websites like Kickstarter and IndieGoGo (Sorensen, 2012). But these funding sources (aside from big budget cinema projects) do not necessarily provide the levels funding for documentaries that have previously been available through the broadcast TV networks such as the BBC, making the option of utilising free amateur video content much more appealing to producers.

**Opportunities**

But while new technology and UGC maybe closing the door to documentary filmmaking for some media professionals, it is opening the door to other content creators, notably in the developing world. Easy access to cheap video technology, social media and the internet that has delivered a wave of UGC to the filmmaker’s edit studio, much of it created on the latest smartphones. While in the global north, mobile telephony evolved from the wired telephone service, via ideas like Hutchison *Rabbit*[12] and pagers towards the modern smartphone, many developing countries have been able to bypass the expensive process of cabling every inch of their country by adopting mobile phone technology (Aker and Mbiti, 2010). Mobile technology is a much cheaper infrastructure to implement (although call costs and handsets are often more expensive) (Aker and Mbiti, 2010), the result is that even

[12] See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbit_%28telecommunications%29

the most remote villages in Africa or India have mobile phones, often sharing a single handset amongst a community to reduce costs. In 2002, mobile phone subscribers over took fixed line subscribers worldwide (Kapplan, 2006) and smart phones, with cameras and social media apps, have become powerful tools for advocacy, for news-gathering and for sharing images and film as the Arab uprisings of 2011/12 have demonstrated[13].

Furthermore, the combination of the capability and affordability of the technology, has allowed users from disenfranchised communities in developing countries to contribute content to debates, often at a more critical point in their country's development cycle than has been the case for their counterparts in the global north. For Martin Luther King to Contribute to the democracy and human rights debate in the USA in the 1960s, his speeches had to be filmed, broadcast and published in the traditional media, actions that required the participation of and filtering by filmmakers, journalists and editors to reach a platform that the public could access. Although the media (including TV) covered the Civil Rights Movement in the US from the outset,

> "[r]arely, if ever, did black participants speak for themselves or address directly America's newly constituted mass television audience." (Everet, 2013).

Indeed there were instances of active censorship. President Lyndon Johnson famously ordered the live feed of Fannie Lou Hamer's speech to the Democratic Convention in 1964 to be cut (Everet, 2013). Cottle (2008) argues that to ensure access to media coverage, the American civil rights movement deliberately manipulated the media the frame the debate in their favour, by provoking attacks

[13] The 'Arab Spring' or the 'Arab uprisings' refers to the series Tunisia of political and social uprisings across the Arab world, sparked by the self-immolation of a market stall-holder in, Muhammad Bouazizi on 17th December 2010 (Gelvin, 2012).

from the police in front of the TV cameras. In Egypt, contributing to the democratic debate during the Arab Spring in 2011/12 just required access to Facebook or Twitter via a smartphone.

The press were quick to dub the Arab uprisings the “Facebook Revolution” or the “Twitter Revolution” (Gelvin, 2012). Gelvin (2012) argues that social media was as consequential to the Arab uprisings as the printing press and the telegraph had been to previous revolutions, as they helped to circulate ideas and facilitate the organisation of events, rather than being the reason behind the events themselves (Gelvin, 2012, p. 52). This may or may not be true, but the key point is that by publishing film, photos and comments to the social media networks and to internet based video channels such as *YouTube* and *Vimeo*, users had access to a virtually unfiltered and unedited global platform to publish their messages. Furthermore, the new camera and smartphone technology, meant they did not require expensive film equipment to achieve this[14]. Indeed while traditional media organisations largely pride themselves on presenting considered journalism and thus have a editorial mandate to present balanced coverage of events[15], social networking sites thrive on opinion and often actively encourage dissent. Facebook’s loose editorial guidelines prohibit the use of the platform for certain functions, but political discourse is fair game:

> “While we encourage you to challenge ideas, institutions, events, and practices, we do not permit individuals or groups to attack others based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability or medical condition.” (Facebook, 2012)

[14] In the 1990s when I started out in TV a broadcast Beta-sp camera cost between £30-60,000. In 2013, an HD video camera that meets broadcast standards costs less than £5000.

[15] For example, see the BBC’s Editorial Guidelines here: http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/

There are reports of instances of material being removed from Facebook[16], but largely UGC on Facebook and other social media sites can address key political issues and current events – as evidenced by the amount of content uploaded during the Arab Spring.

The UGC delivered via social media in the Arab uprisings was[17] bypassing the traditional broadcast networks and rendering the government censors powerless (Cottle, 2011). The Tunisian government's response was to cut off access to the internet, where upon the protestors started to send text messages via Short Messaging Service (SMS) to the Al Jazeera TV network. Cutting access to the mobile phone network was not an option, because the government leaders were using the same networks to organise their own tactics (Gelvin, 2012). The editorial elite no longer had full control over all documentary content.

**Two Way Street**

While filmmakers are still largely dependent on television networks to screen their content if they want to make money, films about crucial development issues are hard to sell into broadcast networks in developing countries. Broadcast networks, keen to generate advertising revenues, choose to screen content that gets 'bums on seats', like UK Premiership football (Johnstone, 2012a). In a recent project that I produced for the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI)[18], approved by the World Bank, despite achieving some distribution, the client has struggled to place *Risking the River?* (Johnstone,

[16] On 28 December 2012, *Worldwide Hippies* reported that several Facebook accounts had been closed because of their political content, including one site that included a quote from and picture of Mahatma Gandhi (Hippies, 2012).

[17] …and still is at the time of writing in Syria.

[18] The NBI is based in Entebbe, Uganda. The organization was established to ensure the equitable management and sharing of resources between Nile Basin states. The organization has the backing and funding of the international community and is a major player in the Nile region. For more information see: http://www.nilebasin.org/

2012b) (a ten minute film about the importance of political cooperation in the Nile Basin) with the TV networks in the region. The official response from Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC) was that they would have “preferred something more close to the Ugandan audience” (Baitwa, 2012)[19]. As of the time of writing the NBI is still struggling to place the film with TV networks in Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan – the major players in the Nile region. While we can only speculate as to the actual reasons behind the networks refusal to broadcast the film (the film is being offered to broadcasters for free), the fact remains that the best intentions of the NBI, that purports to promote political dialogue in the region (a project that all ten riparian countries in the Nile Basin have signed up to and that is funded by international development agencies[20]), access to an audience via the broadcast networks in the region is blocked by the gatekeepers. Even the local political elite struggle to get in.

In many contexts, the solution to the issue of lack of access to a TV network for documentary film distribution is often the internet and in the smartphone, not only had new technology provided a new tool that shaped the way content was produced, but it also offered a new way to distribute that content. During the Arab Spring, the smartphones employed by users to generate content to be uploaded to Facebook or Twitter, were also downloading content, mixed in with news reports and content from the mainstream broadcasters or other news organisations. Material was distributed and read by other protestors in other cities – perhaps even by consumers standing within a few paces of the content’s author. Furthermore, this new internet distribution network is far harder for local authorities to control. In most cases the distribution hub – the computer servers – lie outside the country where content is being consumed and while it is possible for authorities to block websites, access is never completely

[19] UBC did eventually broadcast the film on 21 November 2012 (Baitwa, 2012).

[20] See: http://www.nilebasin.org/

impossible, unless the information providers agree to censor material delivered to consumers, as was the case with Google in China (Sung Wook and Douai, 2012).

But in sub-Saharan Africa, access to the internet is far from universal and this in itself acts as a barrier to the distribution of information and filmed documentary content. Although broadband speeds in countries like Uganda are rapidly increasing and more users are able to access the web, internet access is restricted mainly to urban centres like Kampala (Odinga, 2012). However, smartphones can also be used to send and receive text and media messages via the mobile phone network itself, independent of the World Wide Web.

The power of the mobile phone network in developing countries, coupled with the fact that the networks are much harder for governments to restrict access to (because governments use and rely on them too (Gelvin, 2012)) has not escaped development agencies, keen to deliver key messages to audiences in developing countries. In Uganda, the Grameen Foundation uses a network of *Community Knowledge Workers* (CKWs) armed with mobile phones in rural communities "to provide poor farmers with relevant, timely agricultural information, including caring for animals, planting crops, treating pests and diseases, and getting fair market prices for produce and livestock" (Foundation, ND). The CKWs act as a point of contact for local farmers who are otherwise unable to access critical information to improve their lives often because they are illiterate. Literacy is a requirement of the job for CKWs – part of their task is to read out instructions and information to local farmers (Fox, 2011). But the Grameen Foundation project is not unique, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has run a similar project in Tanzania and according to CNN:

> “As far back as 2003, Kenya's Agricultural Commodities Exchange partnered with mobile operator Safaricom to launch SokoniSMS64, a text-messaging platform to provide pricing information to farmers.” (Ogunlesi and Busari, 2012)

But aside from using the SMS platform to create two-way data streams with developing communities, in theory mobile phone networks (as distinct from the internet) can also act as the distribution platform for photography and film. This concept offers the chance for international development agencies to access audiences that cannot always be reached via traditional television networks, networks that often refuse to accept their development content anyway. In Uganda, the Grameen Foundation is attempting to establish a project to do just this. The idea is to deliver key messages about agricultural practises to farmers in remote rural communities using short video demonstrations and photographs of best practice farming techniques (Fox, 2011). Could this be the model that will finally allow filmmakers, interested in delivering development messages to audiences in the global south, to succeed in achieving their goals? The concept is not so far fetched. In Nigeria the Afrinolly platform is specifically designed to distribute film clips and movies to smartphones (and offers its own smartphone applications to do so) (Afrinolly, 2013), and according to CNN, the Kenya based YouTube channel Kulahappy, also offers content targeting mobile platforms (Ogunlesi and Busari, 2012).

**Challenges**

The new technology has opened up huge creative potential, but as with most avenues that filmmakers have tried to pursue to access audiences in the global

south, the mobile phone distribution model faces its own challenges. The key issue in rural Africa is bandwidth and expense. The Grameen Foundation solution to the cost issue is innovative. By using a central CKW with one phone, a community has a single point of contact and costs are reduced to a minimum, but bandwidth is another issue. Projects like those run by Grameen, and by other agencies like IFAD have demonstrated the benefits of using mobile phone technology as an information network for text based communications as described in *Tanzania: The first Mile* (McCormack, 2006), but transferring large video files over the networks is a major challenge. While the mobile platform has proved itself capable of delivering this functionality in developing countries – as in the case of Afrinolly (Nsehe, 2011) – the necessary bandwidth is not always readily available.

As part of my own work through my company Wild Dog Limited, I have also been looking at using the mobile phone as a potential platform for distributing film to users in the Nile Basin region. As part of this process and in an attempt to better understand the existing market place, Wild Dog commissioned local journalist William Odinga to write a brief overview of the media networks and the popularity of documentary in Uganda (Odinga, 2012). The essential message from Odinga's report was that while television is widely consumed and documentary films are popular, the internet is slow, mainly accessed at work and concentrated in urban areas. Further more, most people do not have access to the latest phone handsets. Although local network provider MTN claims that it can offer 3G mobile networks to over 80% of Uganda (MTN, 2013), for people in a country where the average wage is still only $460 per year (DFID, 2012), ownership of the kind of smartphone capable of handling video files is prohibitively expensive for most people. As a result, distributing film via a mobile phone network to a large audience in impoverished

developing communities is still not immediately viable, neither is the ability of the same community to participate in the debate by generating its own content. Organisations like Digital Green that produce and deliver training film content to farmers in rural India, have specifically acknowledged the issue by developing a data management tool that allows for intermittent internet coverage in rural areas so that data can be uploaded from the field when connections are available (Shah and Joshi, 2010). However, Digital Green's film content is still distributed to hub communities on DVDs, requiring audiences to travel to the screening venues, a practice that is still widely in place in Africa. The majority of the films that Wild Dog Limited produces, still involve shipping DVDs to Africa, rather than delivering content via the web. One thousand copies of *The Nile our River* (Johnstone, 2008) were shipped in 2008 and over two hundred copies of our most recent film *Risking the River?* (Johnstone, 2012b) were shipped in 2012 for use in conferences and workshops.

**Ethical Issues.**

Using mobile platforms and the internet also raises ethical issues, both with the distribution of content to and with the creation of content by users, and with how this content is incorporated into programming. While social networks publish a broad range of content, as Khondker (Khondker, 2011) points out, this means that both sides in a debate can use new media to contest issues, with neither side necessarily presenting a balanced view. While mainstream TV broadcasters like BBC purport to offer impartial coverage of debates and events (BBC, 2013), network television is of course open to abuse and has often been used to support a particular view point, as was the case during the war in the former Yugoslavia (Johnstone, 2012d). Hill (2008) has argued that audience responses to and engagement with texts becomes more sophisticated the more they consume For developing communities, many of whom

are not necessarily experienced media consumers and will therefore not necessarily have the skills to either understand crucial concepts or determine how to engage with those texts, it can be argued that the need for benign editorial filtering is even more important.

The ethical responsibility of the documentary filmmaker attempting to speak to these audiences is not insubstantial. Unfiltered modes of delivery are not necessarily good. As Khondker's logic suggests (Khondker, 2011), if consumers choose only to consume and respond to content from one side of an argument or another, they are therefore not necessarily able make an informed choice. A classic example is the Catholic Church's response to and messages about contraception in the debates over HIV/AIDS and birth control. Globalization 101 points out that:

> "Just as HIV/AIDS has been consistently devastating, the Catholic Church has been consistently and staunchly against the use of birth control since the debate began." (101, 2012)

Catholic News Service (CNS) media outputs encourage the use of medicines and faith based solutions to the HIV/AIDS issue, such as in the film *Catholic health care and AIDS* (CNS, 2012). No mention is made in the film of prevention through the use of condoms in the CNS film. By contrast, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), actively promotes the use of condoms in *Voices from the field on HIV prevention* (UNAIDS, 2011). According to UNAIDS the condom is still "the single, most efficient, available technology to reduce the sexual transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections" (UNAIDS, 2009). For people in developing countries with little understanding of key concepts, poor access to additional data and little previous exposure to documentary texts, which film is to be trusted if they are seeking information to improve their lives?

Similarly, filmmakers that may choose to encourage and accept UGC from content creators in developing countries face similar ethical dilemmas. If we accept Hill's (Hill, 2008) argument that an audience's engagement with documentary becomes more sophisticated over time because they build up layers of experience in viewing films, is the same true with UGC? Do UGC practitioners become not only more skilled in content delivery through practice, but do they also acquire ethical standards that professional journalists and filmmakers receive through training by practice, enabling them to distinguish between suitable and/or relevant content? And at what rate does this knowledge and understanding of ethics occur? Does this mean that UGC from users in developing countries should be assessed differently? In their study of UGC in news production at the BBC Williams et al. describe how in response to the rise in the volume of available content submitted by and available from audiences, the BBC has now established a UGC Hub to manage the content submitted to the network and that BBC journalists now learn how to manage this content as part of their training (Williams et al., 2011, pp.89-90). Having pioneered the use of UGC in the 1990s with *Video Nation* (BBC, 2012), it is perhaps appropriate that the BBC should be setting out rules and guidelines for the use of UGC in programme making.

To manage UGC, the BBC has effectively established an editorial filtering process post-content acquisition, whereas a professional filmmaker striving for balance (effectively adhering to ethical guidelines set out by many broadcasters such as the BBC (BBC, 2013)) applies the editorial filter prior to or during the content acquisition process, often making judgement on content during filming. For the filmmaker, the benefits of UGC are clear – the process can open up a stream of content from a multiplicity of voices and in many cases has reduced field production costs. However,

the downside to this avalanche of UGC is that often the onus for establishing the authenticity of content shifts from the filmmaker in the field to the editor in the studio, leading to organisations like the BBC to announce on a regular basis that 'this footage cannot be verified" (BBC, 2009).

## Conclusions

Documentary filmmakers have long looked to technology to provide them with the best means of delivering stories to audiences. Flaherty and Grierson both adapted existing technologies and devised new methodologies to create their films, while Leacock and Rouch helped pioneer approaches to documentary filmmaking that would have been impossible without the new 16mm film and portable audio recording technology advancements of the 1960s. Since the early 1990s, a revolution in video camera technology and the rise of computer based non-linear editing has slashed documentary film production costs and democratised the film production process, converting film consumers into filmmakers. User Generated Content (UGC) and even content styled to looked like UGC, is now pivotal to many film production workflows and as Williams et al. note:

> "Audience material is often described by commentators and practitioners as having revolutionised journalism by disrupting the traditional relationships between producers and consumers of the news." (Williams et al., 2011, p. 85)

But while the UGC revolution may be contributing to increased competition for filmmakers, journalists and media professionals, it is also creating opportunities for hitherto marginalised communities, including those in developing countries. During the Arab Spring protestors made frequent use of social media to up-load content from

smartphones, which in turn was picked up and aired by the mainstream broadcast networks. Participating in the debate by delivering content direct to media platforms is a privilege not available to other communities, such as the black community during the Civil Rights Movement in America, whose development cycle coincided with earlier media technologies and distribution systems that were ringed fenced by editors and also by professionals armed with specialised equipment, knowledge and training.

Now, for communities in developing countries where the is still a need for huge amounts of information and education on some of the most basic tasks and health issues, mobile telephone networks and the internet offer the potential for filmmakers and development agencies to deliver content direct to those communities, content that may help to change lives. In many cases special adaptation techniques are needed to facilitate the delivery of this content, such as the Community Knowledge Workers used by the Grameen Foundation in Uganda, but networks also need to improve and technology still needs to become cheaper, if these communities can really hope to benefit from these delivery platforms. However, the bright note it that as consumer demand for these products increases and further video channels and platforms are rolled out, the networks that this information is distributed on should become more affordable. These new distributions platforms also appear to be less vulnerable to censorship from autocratic or malevolent authorities than traditional broadcast networks, because the authorities themselves use these same networks to communicate.

However the cautionary note for these distribution channels such as YouTube, Facebook or the mobile phone networks, is that the lack of editorial filtering means

that users with little or no experience in consuming media face challenges in knowing what information to choose to trust and to believe when viewing content. Technology may enable more filmmakers to create and deliver more films over diverse platforms, but this technology cannot dislodge the filmmaker from the core of the filmmaking process. The ethical responsibility for ensuring that content delivered to developing communities through these new distributions channels remains balanced, accurate and fair, lies squarely with the filmmaker or content creator, a responsibility that untrained or non-professional practitioners may not necessarily be able to manage, or indeed that or practitioners with a specific agenda may not wish to respect.

Andy Johnstone

Devon, February 2013

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