Chapter 11
Social Media in Micro SME Documentary Production

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ABSTRACT

Micro SME documentary producers are challenged to understand, adapt and apply social media technology in the creative economies. This paper examines the technological premise of social media, applications and limitations in documentary filmmaking. Drawing from other fields such as psychology, the author proposes a Real- and Virtual World Networking Model (RVNM), theorizing on how documentary producers can connect via social media networking to generate strong system support for their documentary project. RVNM helps documentary filmmaker make sense of the complexity of social media from development to distribution in order to further stimulate significant growth within the creative industries.

INTRODUCTION

Why Social Media Counts: More than 1 Billion Users Use Facebook Regularly

According to Joshua Oppenheimer, ‘The Act of Killing’ was made available to more than 1400 community screenings via an underground distribution network and social media (Oppenheimer, 2014), (Bjerregaard, 2014). Brian Knappenberger and his team successfully raised $ 93,724 for ‘The Story of Aaron Swartz’ (Kickstarter, 2014). On January 18 John Pilger’s War Documentary closed its crowd funding campaign exceeding the £ 60,000 funding goal by £ 11,830 (Pilger, 2015). Kartemquin films raised $153,875 exceeding the original funding goal by 3,875 to produce ‘Life Itself – A feature documentary based on Roger Ebert’s memoir’ (Kartemquin Films, 2015). A quick search on crowd-funding platforms will produce a number of similar successes. Still, as we will discover, social media and connected crowd-funding campaigns are perceived as a ‘waste of time’, even as begging: ‘chatting on Facebook does not produce films’ (Denis Vaslin, Personal Communication, 2014). This perspective very much represents the old paradigm in a swiftly changing global media landscape. On the other hand, micro SME documentary producers embracing this new technology experience and define social media as value enhancing, as

we will see later. Social media provides new opportunities to micro SME documentary producers as traditional power structures in broadcasting significantly shift away from traditional broadcasting models: game changing OTT streaming services serving for example Netflix, dominated much of IBC’s theme in Amsterdam (IBC Content Everywhere, 2015). Chaired by Publisher Andrew Neil (Preston, 2002), Bruce Tuchman of the AMC and Sundance Channel (AMC Networks, 2015), Michael Harrit of Sony (Sony UK, 2015), Rhys Noellke of RTL Group (RTL Group, 2015) discussed how traditional broadcasters need to adapt to OTT services at the IBC keynote forum (ibTV, 2015): more bandwidth, more video streaming, more network intelligence applications analysing user behaviour and preferences, continue to challenge traditional broadcasters. There is no reason to assume that this trend is going to reverse any time soon. Reacting to this trend, traditional broadcasters are developing and implementing social media strategies to remain competitive, contracting OTT service providers in order to set up their own VOD brand. HBO for example launched its OTT service in 2014 (Littleton, 2014). Joram ten Brink, Co-Producer of ‘The Act of Killing’ rightly points out that broadcast commissions continue to shrink, budgets are not getting bigger and competition for these funds is increasing (Joram ten Brink, Personal Communication, 2014). Social media is being discussed at micro SME level, broadcasters such as HBO, Channel 4, BBC, ARD – all are adapting to this new challenge by setting up their own OTT video streaming services involving social media. But what exactly is social media? How did it evolve and why is it important to documentary filmmakers? To understand how social media is influencing documentary production we examine social media in documentary production from an economic, technological, ethnographic, psychological and marketing perspective. Social media is a multi-faceted phenomenon and cannot be sufficiently explored from a single perspective. What technological developments took place giving rise to social media? How did the participatory culture in social media evolve? What is needed for a credible and authentic virtual presence? And why is all of this important to documentary filmmakers?

**BACKGROUND**

**The Technological Evolution of Social Media**

Social media is intrinsically linked with ‘cloud’ based binary technology. The cloud allows users to run applications and store information on server farms run for example by Google or Facebook, accessing and contributing information globally in digital form. Dropbox (2009) and Google Drive (2015) are examples of data sharing cloud services; social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn store user information in the cloud. Social network giant Facebook, established in 2004 (Philips, 2007), features of all social media networking site the most user subscriptions: 1.49 billion in the first quarter of 2015 (Statista, 2015). One in every five people on Earth has a Facebook account and more users are joining Facebook by the hour. 800 million users worldwide (Statista, 2015) subscribed to mobile messaging service WhatsApp, founded in 2009 (Satariano, 2014). Twitter came online in 2006 (Liedtke, 2013) counting 304 million subscriptions (Statista, 2015). LinkedIn began developing its social networking services in 2002 (LinkedIn, 2015) with 354 million users worldwide (Statista, 2015). Video streaming experienced strong growth with the arrival of digital networking technology and sufficient bandwidth. YouTube, established in 2005 (Monica, 2006), streamed its first video on April 23, 2005 (Karim, 2005) and features globally over one billion users (Youtube, 2015). Mobile devices have reached 6.9 billion subscriptions worldwide. 9.5 billion users are projected to have a mobile device by 2020 with access to