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Strategic impact documentary: Contexts of production and social intervention
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Abstract

The past decade has seen the emergence of a new kind of documentary-making that marries documentary story-telling and the principles of strategic communication. Strategic impact documentary is a transmedia practice that aims to achieve specific social change by aligning documentary production with online and offline communications practices. The contemporary media environment is one in which a wide range of organisations work to achieve their political and social goals through the media. This paper highlights key characteristics of an emerging form of professional documentary production, drawing attention to formal development and changing contexts of production and the implications of this for our understanding of the link between documentary and social change.

Keywords: documentary, strategic communication, power, civic orientation, social change.

'This has been the decade in which the power of film to change the world has become impossible to ignore. Through the hard work and commitment of thousands of dedicated individuals, we've seen it all: major artistic achievement, radical experiment and innovation and serious social change' BRITDOC Impact Field Guide

Documentary's ability to catalyze social change has long been claimed and also questioned: From the civic goals of 1930s British documentary to activist filmmaking and most recently the proliferation of popular political documentary films following in the wake of *Fahrenheit 9-11.* While this most recent wave of political documentary suggests ongoing faith in the ability of documentary to encourage if not actually to instigate social change, it has also been accompanied by a heated debate about documentary impact: Can the impact of documentary be measured? Do new forms of online data allow us to better understand the ways in which documentary impacts on public discourse? These debates are fascinating and important but this article argues that what is perhaps even more significant is the way in which they indicate the emergence of what is effectively a new kind of documentary production, one that aims to produce social change by integrating documentary production and strategic communication.

Strategic Impact Documentary

Over the past decade it is possible to trace the growth and professionalisation of what we call here, the strategic impact documentary sector (other terms used are 'social issue' documentary and 'campaign documentary'). We are aware that the term 'impact' can be seen as contaminated by its reductive and exploitative use in a range of neoliberal settings, including within marketing. However, we want to make the case for assessing what is going on in this sector as both more complex and more positive in some of its implications than a straight aversion to the term itself would suggest. This

growing media industry includes a range of organisations: foundations; not-for-profits,; corporations and brands, as well as documentary producers, makers, and distributors. The size and scope of the sector suggests a parallel 'industry' that intersects with established structures but which has its own sources of funding, its own methods of production and distribution and its own organizational ecology. Foundations like The Fledgling Fund provide resources for production and outreach (at the time of writing the foundation claims to have distributed $11.9 Million in funding to 300+ projects - see The Fledgling Fund (2015)); BRITDOC, a non-profit foundation based in the UK, runs Good Pitch, an event that aims to connect documentary makers and brands, foundations and the third sector. Since 2008, BRITDOC claims that Good Pitch has presented 134 projects to more than 2676 organisational representatives, triggering over $16 Million in funding (BRITDOC 2014). Commercial entertainment companies like Participant Media specialize in the production of content aimed at social change while impact producers like Borderline Media[1] build strategic communications plans around documentary film. There are also alternative distribution companies like Film Sprout [2] that specialize in organizing community screenings.

There are several key factors that have driving the growth of strategic impact documentary over the past decade. Firstly, the ongoing decline of 'traditional' funding sources for documentary making (predominantly funding linked to television broadcast in the UK). As Sørensen (2012) demonstrates, this shift in funding has had the effect of increasing the production of sponsored documentary and encouraging documentary makers' exploration of alternative funding sources. The increase in sponsored documentary can also be understood in light of structural and cultural changes in the political sphere facilitated by the Internet. Dahlgren (2013: 14-17) highlights the importance of alternative spaces for contemporary politics, noting that the democratic potential of these spaces and their perceptions of desirable social change vary considerably. A number of organisations see the potential of documentary to meet their goals, which in turn is shaping the process of production in ways that are so far not well understood.

While the changing contexts of production are fundamental to understanding the political impact of this form of documentary, we acknowledge the significance of the broader 'documentary project' with its history of persuasion and political activism (see for example Aitkin 1990, Winston 1995, Corner 1996). Of particular relevance, however, is the history of 'committed' documentary (Waugh 1984). Waugh (1984: xiii) traces a history of leftist documentary film production as social intervention in which films, are 'made by activists speaking to specific publics to bring about specific political goals'. There is a clear line of continuity here between film as specific intervention oriented toward social change. Similarly, there is continuity in terms of filming methods, with collaboration a cornerstone of committed filmmaking. Activist documentary makers like Judith Helfand (*The Uprising of '34* and *Blue Vinyl*), have been activing in establishing many of the organisations that are now central to the field. Strategic communications organisations like Active Voice trace their roots to public television, in this case the PBS Television Race Initiative (Kemmitt, 2007) and Distributors New Day Films (founded in

[1] http://borderlinemedia.net/
[2] www.filmsprout.org

1971) began as a postal distribution service for feminist filmmakers.[3] While a fuller consideration of the links between activist filmmaking and strategic impact documentary is beyond the scope of this paper it is important to note this strong connection to particularly US, leftist film and television documentary at the level of individuals and organisations as well as production and distribution.

However there are also several dimensions of change. Firstly, alongside growth the sector is characterized by increased professionalization. To quote strategy organization Active Voice: 'Today the field is blooming, as more and more entrepreneurs – impact producers, distribution experts, campaign strategists, and media makers – build upon our promising practices while contributing a range of new skills and expertise' (Salehi and Schneider 2015). In this paper we argue that strategic impact documentary, whatever its historical precedents, reflects a distinct conceptualization of the relationship between documentary and social change grounded in contemporary strategic communication. We chart a professionalization of documentary's activist ambitions that, we believe has implications for understanding its generic development, the process of production and its social influence. Alongside this we see evidence of globalization, driven by the emergence of transnational organisations, and a move towards a popularization of social change films that connect with individuals' engagement with issue politics.

In addition to charting the professionalization of the sector this paper explores the implications of strategic impact film for the configuration of media power, noting both the potential for new connections between professional media producers and extra-political actors and the connections between film as a 'mass' medium and the issue networks within which it is often created and deployed. We look at film production and distribution as a site for fostering specific forms of political engagement and public attention in an increasingly competitive 'attention economy' (see Davenport and Beck, 2002). Documentary has a distinctive relationship to the circulation of public knowledge and therefore to issues of power – its reinforcement or questioning - that has been a recurring subject of critical analysis. We suggest that while the developments we explore require close critical scrutiny, the focus on strengthening social movements and amplifying traditionally marginalized voices and issues shows potential for an emerging application of 'good media power' (Corner 2011: 37). Of course the deployment of documentary to achieve political goals is not restricted to the largely progressive sector we are describing here and the circulation of film in support of conservative political positions must also be taken into account. This however is beyond the scope of this paper. What we aim to chart here is an approach to film funding and production that we see as having implications for how we understand the role of film in challenging established authority.

Impact and Strategy: Key concepts in strategic production

Strategic impact documentaries aim to achieve kinds of quite tightly specified social change. The measured capacity of a documentary to achieve this is described as its impact. Chattoo and Das (2014: 7) for example define impact as 'the change that

[3] See for example https://www.newday.com/content/how-new-day-began

happens to individuals, groups, organisations, systems and social or physical conditions' as a result of media production. Clark and Abrash (2011: 8) similarly draw attention to ability of social issue media to 'inform, engage and motivate publics'. These definitions highlight the multidimensionality of impact, identifying the different change targets (from individuals, to organizations to social and political structures) and the different change goals (from awareness, to attitude, behavior and structural/policy change). While the technical challenge of demonstrating a link between documentary and social change is a pressing issue for those working in the sector, the basic belief in the ability of documentary to promote social change is not; the Fledgling Fund (2008) is indicative:

> From the Fledgling Fund's perspective, it seems intuitive and logical that a well-made documentary film – especially one with a compelling narrative and well-crafted outreach plan - would serve as a catalyst to change minds, encourage viewers to alter entrenched behaviors and start, inform or re-energize social movements!

While a direct connection between documentary films and specific social change has been widely claimed (see the discussion of established assumptions here in Gains 1999) it has seldom been demonstrated. This is perhaps not surprising given the range of unplottable social contexts and dynamics within which a documentary film receives its selective exposure. Strategic impact producers are aware of the complex relationship between media and social change. In response there is a focus on the entire documentary making process from production to screening and beyond as an opportunity to realize specific outcomes (here, the work of political scientist David Whiteman has been particularly influential see Whiteman 2004). In other words, social impact is something that the project team works to produce, through the processes of strategic communication, rather than something that just happens (or not) when audiences encounter a documentary film.

There is therefore an important formal distinction to be made between this work and traditional film and television documentary. Rather than existing as a single, discrete media object, strategic impact documentaries are hybrid communications products that cross media platforms and combine audio-visual representation with various mediated and face-to-face communications activities. Karlin and Johnson (2011) refer to these transmedia, issues-focused projects as 'film-based social action campaigns'. Similarly, Finneran (2014) notes the growing tendency to couple documentary and social change campaigns. In other words the documentary text is re-imagined as just one element (albeit a central element) in a strategic communication campaign. Campaigns may involve a range of online elements – social media, websites, online petitions – written elements such as information packs, educational and promotional materials, and forms of face-to-face communication including grassroots events and specific lobbying activities. It is possible to understand these hybrid communications products as a kind of transmedia storytelling (Jenkins 2006:97-98). As in other kinds of transmedia storytelling, there is a dispersal of communications elements across media platforms, with each making a distinctive contribution to the impact project. Karlin and Johnson (2011) argue that, in the transmedia projects they examine, it is the issue and social change campaign that is dispersed across platforms. While each element is self-contained, they work together to communicate their messages and, hopefully, persuade audiences to take specific action.

We will consider the strategic deployment of various communications elements in some detail below, however it is worth considering at this point one example of this dispersed communications activity. The documentary *The Invisible War* addresses the problem of sexual assault in the U.S. military (see BRITDOC 2013 for a detailed impact report). The campaign began during the production process and included strategic relationship building with key Republican decision makers, community and advocacy groups. Once the film was finished communications activities included influencer and community screenings as well as targeted social media and lobbying. As impact production has developed, communications campaigns have become increasingly complex and documentary makers have found themselves under pressure from funders to develop 'full-blown social change campaigns' (MacArthur 2013) around their films. This has led to a new production role: the impact producer. As an impact producer, MacArthur describes her role as the provision of strategic leadership and planning, identifying target audiences and key influencers, partnership management and financial management of the campaign. Finneran (2014: 6 - 8) similarly highlights the distinct skillset required to design a successful impact campaign and suggests that as the impact sector gains momentum there is increasing pressure on filmmakers to work with impact strategists to develop and carry out strategic outreach and engagement activities. Companies specializing in impact production like Active Voice and Participant Media are also emerging.

'Impact is hardly serendipitous; it requires strategy' (Finneran 2014: 4)

Strategic impact documentary aims to create impact by re-imagining documentary in terms of the contemporary principles of strategic communication as they have informed advertising and marketing and extended into political communication (see the review of the term in Hallahan et al, 2007). In the case of strategic impact documentary the goal is to achieve specific objectives through a range of communicative actions – the film itself, but also as we have seen above, a range of online and face-to-face tactics. Although strategic communications plans can vary across sectors (marketing, public relations, organizational communications etc.) it is possible to identify several key elements (drawing on Mahoney 2013:7-8): issue analysis, identification of key publics; articulation of goals and objectives; strategy development that drives key messaging; selection of tactics and evaluation. The outcome of communications activities, the impact a project seeks to have, will take the form of specific actions or behaviors that are achievable given existing awareness and attitudes and measurable within a specific timeframe.

In the white papers, case studies and guides produced by those working in the sector it is possible to see how elements of strategic communication intersect with the production of documentary throughout the production process. Goal setting is grounded in analysis of the awareness and attitudes of target audiences. BRITDOC's (2015) *Impact Field Guide and Toolkit* identifies four different types of goals or 'impact dynamics'. 'Changing minds' asks documentary makers to consider the attitudes or beliefs they are trying to change or create; 'changing behaviors' calls attention to the potential to promote specific actions such as buying or boycotting, donating or volunteering; 'building communities' focuses on the requirement for teams to support

existing grassroots communities and finally 'changing structures' interrogates the potential for top-down change by looking for laws, political formations and structures that impact the particular issue. The logic of strategic communication draws the attention of documentary makers to the relationship between story, communications activities and impact goals. As the Fledgling Fund (2014) notes: 'the importance of the link between a project's goals and strategy and its impact assessment plan cannot be understated.'

The re-imagining of documentary according to the principles of strategic communication clearly raises questions about the kinds and intensities of directed influence at work across multiple sites or moments (Corner 2000: 378). In the following sections we will consider in more detail what we see as four key sites of change: the interdependence of documentary messages and campaign goals; a focus on strategic relationship building; the constructing of engagement through emotion, both in the text itself and in the experience of viewing; and finally, impact measurement. As will become evident in the course of this analysis these four tendencies are closely linked

Documentary messages and campaign goals

In the process of contemporary strategic communication messages are, at every stage, carefully crafted in light of the specified goals of the communication process. As the fundamental element of the strategic communications plan, the documentary itself, its messages, characters and framing, have a critical role to play. Citing the example of the documentary *Blue Vinyl*, (Helfand and Gold, 2002) Barret and Leddy (2008) point to the importance of making connections between a documentary's content and the goals of the campaign, particularly allowing key stakeholders to have input into the development of its messages:

> Early on, when the film was still being researched, the producers reached out to the Coming Clean Collaborative … Through a series of feedback screenings of the 18-minute trailer, the rough cut and finally the 94-min final project, members of the Coming Clean Collaborative informed the film's narrative, assuring that the film's messaging dovetailed with their organizing campaigns.

Hirsch (2007: 2) similarly emphasis the importance of shaping messages in relation to specific target audiences, a process she describes as an 'audience-centred' approach to content development.

Typically, strategic communicators categorise target audiences in terms of their relationship to the specific social issue and/or communications goal. Where the goal is to raise awareness a general public may be identified but more typically publics are groups with a particular relationship to the project. This might include activist or community groups already working in the issue space, individuals or groups with particular decision-making authority or those who may be affected by an issue. Once the target publics are identified, research into awareness and attitudes informs the creation of messages. Campolo (2013: 8) identifies the documentary 'frame' as a way of presenting the issues in order to solicit specific responses. VanDeCarr (2010:4) sees documentary narrative forms as having a particular significance in terms of overcoming

ideological difference: 'People 'take sides' on an issue, but it's much harder to 'take sides' on a story. Stories, as opposed to polemics, have qualities that enable them to connect and move people'. We will consider the significance of emotion in more detail below, but here we wish to highlight to the way in which documentary messages are being reconceived in light of their perceived ability to intervene in a particular social space rather than simply to be judged by audiences, critics and commentators as 'moving' or 'persuasive'.

This view of documentary storytelling as shaped by the project's impact goals and communication strategy challenges traditional notions of documentary as artistic statement and/or journalistic investigation. BRITDOC (2015) acknowledges this potential tension in its production model, identifying two interdependent visions for the project – one artistic and the other focused on impact. The artistic vision is understood in traditional filmmaking terms as the director's artistic vision for the film. The impact vision, on the other hand, is the team's collective vision for the impact the film will have. However, the relationship between the two visions is not explicitly considered (an omission that might deserve attention in future drafts) In BRITDOC's Impact planning framework [4] teams are encouraged to link the film's messages to target audiences and impact goals. The published impact report for *The Invisible War* (BRITDOC 2013) shows how this works in practice. The primary goal of the project (based on issue analysis) was to change policy around the adjudication of sexual assault claims. The campaign involved a range of both grassroots and strategically targeted actions (BRITDOC encourages filmmakers to see the connections between bottom up and top down social change) aimed at the military and key decision makers. Messages were designed to persuade these audiences: the film was clearly pro-military, with several victims highlighting their families' military connections. The documentary establishes a problem frame, emphasizing the scale and impact of the problem, while presenting policy change as the obvious solution. The filmmakers' have noted (BRITDOC 2013) the importance of constructing the documentary to counter 'any possible loopholes for avoiding new legislation'.

Strategic relationship building

Strategic impact documentary shares with 'committed documentary' (Waugh 2011) a sense of the value of creating film with and for those engaged in social movements. However, the value of collaboration is considered less as a corrective response within the politics of representation and more in terms of its ability to enhance impact. Whiteman's (2009; 2004) coalition model of the political impact of documentary is frequently cited by those in the impact sector as a way of conceptualizing the link between relationships and impact. To understand the political impact of documentary, Whiteman argues, we cannot simply consider the impact of the finished film on an audience, but must rather take into account the entire documentary making process and its potential to enhance the work of groups and individuals already working toward change in the 'issue network' (Whiteman 2009). This model has been influential in giving focus to the value of strategic relationship development as a way of building impact. Relationships can serve several functions including, informing project development and shaping messages (see above), providing the filmmakers with

[4] http://impactguide.org/library/ImpactPlanWorksheet.pdf

legitimacy in the issue network, connecting the film with relevant policy makers, contributing to audience engagement, audience building and integrating the film into social change activities (see for example Verellen 2010: 9)

Again, *The Invisible War* provides insight into the importance of relationship development within the issue space. The filmmakers established relationships with key political decision makers, particularly Republican members of the House (BRITDOC 2013: 4):

> They did this by establishing close one on one relationships with key politicians and their staff, always presenting the film as bipartisan … Simultaneously, they worked with Susan Burke, the leading attorney on this issue, who is also in the film, holding a series of meetings over a year long period with over two dozen senators and/or their staff. As a result when these senators began to take a leading role on this issue, the team was in a position to guide them toward championing removing adjudication from the chain of command.

Here the process of documentary making (interviewing Susan Burke) blurs with the strategic communications activities (lobbying decision makers) in such a way that the expertise of Burke is marshalled in support of the team's impact goals both in the film and as a lobbyist. Becoming part of the broader issue network and the growing grassroots support helped the team to implement a social media campaign. The team turned up whenever the issue was debated, using Twitter to reveal which members were present (and which were not), sending thank you messages to those who supported the change and sending 'why don't you stand up for survivors of military rape?' messages to non-participants.

Building engagement through emotion

The concept of audience engagement has become increasingly important in the impact sector as a way of conceptualizing the link between documentary media and social change (Napoli 2014). As Napoli notes, engagement can be seen as a precondition for impact, as a proxy for impact or as a form of impact in its own right. Although it can be difficult to capture the different ways in which engagement as a concept is deployed in the strategic impact space, typically what is most valued by producers of social change media is the willingness of people to engage in actions that could be described as civic – from seeking further information to signing petitions and organizing events (Napoli 2014: 17). The ability to connect audiences to social issues emotionally, both through the documentary itself and through the screening experience is seen as a pathway to audience engagement.

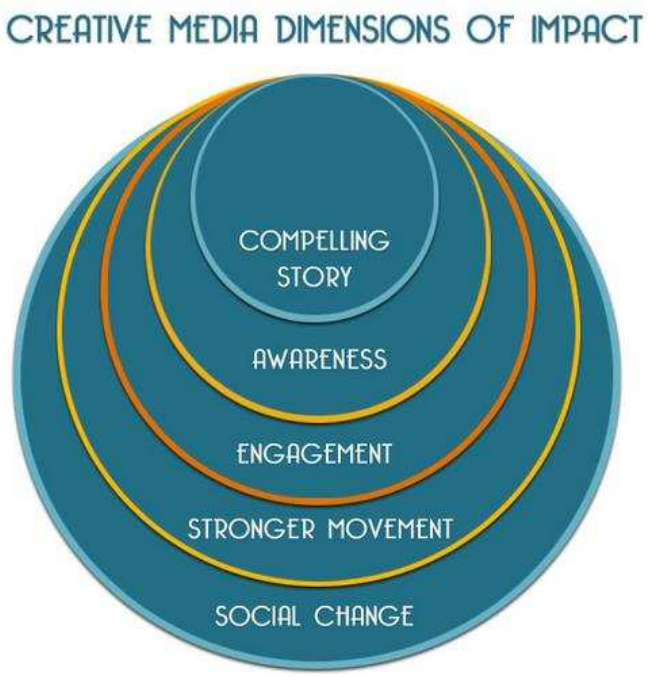

Figure 1: The Fledgling Fund dimensions of impact
(in Barrett and Leddy 2008: 15)

The Fledgling Fund's 'Dimensions of Impact' model (Figure 1) places 'compelling story' at the heart of the social change process. While a compelling story serves a range of functions – enhancing distribution through festival selections, awards and media coverage for instance – a key function is fostering emotional engagement. Verellen (2010:3), for example, identifies a 'strong character-driven' story as critical to inspiring social change because it builds an emotional connection between the viewer and the film that can serve as a basis for engagement. BRITDOC (2015) similarly highlights the importance of emotional engagement, pointing to long-form storytelling as a factor:

> Unlike shorter forms such as news and social media, long form documentary takes the time to build empathy more deeply, involving audiences directly and immersing them fully in the situation of others, prompting them to engage and act.

The link between emotion and action is at the heart of impact measurement research being conducted by Participant Media, to be discussed in more detail below. What is important here is not the specific empirical claim as much as the currency of the belief, within the impact sector, that emotion is a key catalyst of action.

In recent years, documentary's emotional address has been the subject of stronger interest. Of relevance here is scholarship exploring the relationship between documentary affect and public address (see for example Dovey, 2000, Smaill 2010 and Cowie, 2011) The emotional dimension of documentary representation itself is one aspect of this relationship but also relevant is the potential for documentary engagement to foster social relationships. In other words there is both a concern for the

rhetorical effects of emotion but also for the link between emotion, deliberation, social relations and social action (the broader, and often disguised, relationships between deliberation and emotion in a political context are discussed in Hall, 2007). What we see in the strategic impact space is a conscious focus on generating an affective relationship to the social issue and issue networks in order to motivate action. Emotions as much as, and sometimes more than, knowledge feed into social subjectivity and the 'social imaginary', becoming the generators of a collective orientation.

Alternative screening experiences are important to the distribution of strategic impact documentary. Forum screenings, in which the documentary is followed by a Q and A or discussion, and community screenings are a key tactic. Verellen (2010) highlights how the screening is being re-imagined as an engagement opportunity:

> Viewing a social issue film can, despite the importance of the issues, be a profoundly passive activity. Emotions can run high, but an audience member may not be interacting with the issue in any substantive way before or during the screening. But, when a film ends and audience emotions are tangible, the filmmaking team with the support of its partners has a real opportunity to move the audience from passive to active. That small but critical window of opportunity – high emotions, a captive audience, a pressing social issue and collaborative partners – are the right ingredients for inspiring audiences to begin or strengthen their engagement with the social issue.

In this window of opportunity the filmmakers and their outreach partners need to be able to provide audiences with immediate actions that will address their fundamental question – 'what can I do?' In answering this question impact producers and partners seek to generate various 'asks', specific actions that audience members can take that support the social change campaign. Asks may vary from relatively small actions, going online to get further information (prompted by the display of URLs as part of the film's credit sequence, for example) to sharing information, signing a petition, making a donation or otherwise getting more actively involved. For impact producers the emotion generated by viewing the film alongside others needs to be harnessed and converted into forms of immediate action, something that audiences can do 'in the moment'.

A belief in the utility of alternative screenings to build engagement underpins Robert Greenwald's Brave New Films/ Brave new Theatres project. In the 'Brave New Film Philosophy' (Smithline cited in Christensen 2009: 79) the film serves as a way of 'winning people's hearts and minds', while community screening serves to motivate them to take action. The film and the screening are interdependent as Greenwald (cited in Christensen 2009:80) argues:

> … with our model, it then leads to social change, because to me the most important social factor, probably, is that we don't do the traditional screening, and after every single screening […] people are asked to do something. Now that doesn't exist if you are in the movie theatres or even if you are on PBS [the US Public Broadcasting System]. With that in mind, that informs many decisions about how we make the films and what's in them, knowing that the goal is people sitting

> around in a church, in a school, in a bowling alley and watching it, seeing it and then saying 'I am going to do this, this and this' …

In addition to motivating audiences to engage with specific actions, alternative kinds of screening are also seen as a way of harnessing a kind of peer pressure. Hirsch (2007), for example, argue that forum screenings counteract selectivity bias, the tendency for those who disagree with a film's premise to disregard its arguments. Comparing television and forum screening audiences of the documentary *Two Towns of Jasper* (Dow and Williams 2002) they claim that those who attended the forum screening came away with greater awareness of the issue and a greater willingness to get involved. Similarly, Barrett and Leddy (2008: 4) highlight the potential of community screenings to leverage interpersonal relationships in order to reach audiences 'beyond the choir'. Community and facilitated screenings are also important to the strategic impact process in that they provide opportunities to collect evidence of impact.

Evaluating impact

The measurement of impact has been the most controversial aspect of the strategic impact production process. A survey conducted by The Fledgling Fund (2014) found broad opposition to measurement amongst documentary makers (62%). Winston (2014) provides an academic critique, linking impact measurement to the history of positivist mass communication scholarship grounded in simplistic theories of media effects. He traces the persistent belief in 'strong' media influence from the *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast 'panic' of 1938 through to highly questionable strands of research into media violence. Such belief underpins those methods of impact evaluation that, presently, do little more than marry traditional measures of media exposure – screening attendance, box office data, and TV ratings – with measures of publicity (largely analysis of media reports) and internet activity (either quantitative measures of 'clicktivism' or versions of sentiment analysis)

Rather than revisiting the broader debate over impact as a notion, however, important as the continuation of this undoubtedly is, we want to explore here the key role that impact measurement plays in the strategic impact production economy. Finneran (2014: 10) observes that the rapid growth of impact measurement reflects a general increase in strategic impact production. Impact measurement is a key requirement of those funding this work and it serves as an, albeit uncertain, coin of exchange in the production economy; a measure of return on investment for media funders (see Cieply 2014). The economic value of 'data' (the Harmony Institute is currently exploring 'data-driven storytelling') in this emerging media economy reflects broad shifts towards scientific and 'data-driven' views of the audiences across the media industries (Napoli 2011: 11). At the same time the use of data (particularly forms of social and mainstream media analysis) represents a desire to quantify changes in public opinion (however complex), a desire that is reflective of the potential value of 'public opinion' as a political resource.

Measurement is fundamental to the strategic communications process, with evaluation linking to project goals and strategy. A key step in this process is operationalizing the goals of the documentary team in the form of measurable pieces of 'evidence', and therefore what is measurable becomes a key factor in the design of the communications

campaign. Campolo (2013: 11-12) highlights the challenge of operationalizing complex social change goals, noting that the process involves interpretive and subjective choices 'in order to move from a vague concept to a measurable outcome'. While the ability to harvest large amounts of audience data from social media and other online sources is having a significant impact on the sector as we shall see, the type of data and the approach to measurement are driven by the project's goals and strategy. It should also be noted that impact measurement can also become part of the communications campaign, providing the opportunity to refine the communication plan as it is unfolding and thereby help to maximize impact. Karlin and Johnson (2011) distinguish between summative and formative evaluation, noting the role the latter plays in informing communications activities.

The proliferation of software 'tools' for measuring impact highlight the appeal of 'big data' in this space, as well as the importance of telling stories with data through visualization and narrativisation. The Participant Index (TPI), developed by Participant Media, combines traditional measures of exposure (ratings, box office) and social media activity with a survey that aims to understand individual viewers' emotional connections to media. The focus of TPI is on demonstrating the link between emotional experience and social activity. The Harmony Institute's StoryPilot on the other hand combines a range of existing datasets. Measures of exposure – such as trailer views and box office data – and social media data (Facebook and Twitter) that combines reach (the number of followers/likes/tweets/shares) with some content analysis (identification of key terms and hashtags). In addition StoryPilot considers 'information seeking' (for example the number of hits on the project's Wikipedia page), 'amplification' (i.e. mainstream media mentions) and 'policy' impact (in the case of *The Invisible War* this includes mentions by politicians and policy outcomes).

In the debates about impact measurement there are mixed feelings about the impact of big data. On the one hand the ability to track and measure online activity provides new ways of understanding documentary's role in shaping conversations about social issues, but at the same time there is a general concern that for many projects much of the 'crucial long-term, off-line, grasstops and/or deeply personal impact' of documentary will be missed (Fledgling Fund 2014). This fear echoes Winston's (2014) argument that there is something shallow about counting social media mentions and website views; that it is the antithesis of an engagement with genuine social change. In their response to the Impact debate, The Fledgling Fund (2014) highlights both the importance of qualitative data and the need to use data to tell a persuasive story about the impact of a particular film:

> While quantitative or numerical data may be easier to come by and compare qualitative data, which is more descriptive and observational, in many cases is more appropriate to capture the complexities of social change. With this quantitative and qualitative data, filmmakers can create a story (which we know they can do!) about the impact they have had. This 'impact story' allows for deep context that cannot be achieved with numerical data alone

Regardless of what, precisely, is measured, the focus on measurement (because of the important role it plays in the production economy) means that the need to use data as

evidence in order to tell compelling stories about social impact is an integral part of the strategic impact production process.

Impact, media practice and social intervention.

While strategic impact documentary has obvious consequences for those who produce and study documentary film, where its presence needs to be recognized alongside the continuation of more established approaches, its significance clearly goes much further. It is our contention that strategic impact documentary represents an important sector for analysis since it sheds light on non-mainstream media practices used by a range of groups outside the sphere of official politics working to achieve political and social change. We have engaged with it here it as a complex process of mediation (involving not only various platforms but a range of interpersonal and communicative acts) that seeks to create and direct issue publics with the aim of producing an orientation to participatory action (civic subjectivity as civic agency).

Strategic impact documentary draws attention to the complex processes of political mediatization in a transmedia environment. What we describe here is an extension of the cinematic and televisual, such that what is 'produced' are a wide variety of communications products and practices that circulate around the primary documentary text. The process of production and distribution are similarly transformed in light of the projects impact goals, with collaboration and alternative distribution both serving as important paths to 'impact'. Strategic impact documentary is therefore complex, with both its ethics (notably the play-off between its tightly calibrated instrumentality and the proper deliberative space of the citizen) and its levels of efficacy still open to assessment. Just what array of 'issues' its pragmatic affordances carry through into parts of the public sphere and with what political and social consequences it is still too early to judge. Given some of the guiding ideas, there is a clear need for vigilance. There is also a clear need for further empirical analysis of the field in order to better understand how this work is funded, produced and distributed on the ground as well as the extent to which forms of 'strategic' media production are deployed in other political and ideological contexts.

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