Social Engagement Through Mobile Video: *Follow Me Around Series*

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MSP 4541: Mobile Media

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December 10, 2021

Introduction

Mobile media technologies have granted and empowered content creators with an increased amount of creative flexibility. Today, we have access to all kinds of powerful media devices that give us the freedom to create and watch anything we want, whenever, and wherever we want to. In their article "Watch, Share or Create," Bahiyah Omar and Wang Dequan (2020, p.121) highlight how mobile videos have become widely accessible, and thus more popular, around the world. In this paper, I will highlight how mobile videos, such as my mobile video project "Follow Me Around", facilitate social interactions, in addition to uncovering what sort of benefits an audience can find in mobile video content.

Topic Overview

In the past, humans heavily depended on the use of cameras to take videos. In, "Making Films and Video Art with Smartphones" Marsha Berry (2017) discusses Dziga Vertov's creative use of early cameras. As Berry describes, "He magnifies everyday events to expose the mechanics of social activities, thereby to make the taken for granted mundane details become the centre of attention." (2017, p. 133). Film cameras tend to take high resolution footage in comparison to mobile video devices, and so, audiences are much more likely to be mesmerized and taken aback by how real something could look on screen, despite it being the result of manipulating framing and composition.

In the 21st century, however, we've been increasingly navigating towards our smartphones to record video content. Mobile devices tend to have lower resolutions than DSLR, or film cameras and thus offer less "professional" content, however, the power of mobile video content shouldn't be undermined as the medium carries plenty of unique uses and social benefits for us. As Berry expresses, with mobile video devices we "could take photos or shoot videos whenever the impulse arose." (2017, p. 134). The accessibility and convenience of using mobile phones to take videos has made it much easier for filmmakers to take videos any time they please. Berry further highlights that the raw footage taken on mobile phones are more credible for the audiences due to how the footage *typically* doesn't appear to be modified or taken on purpose. Rather, it's "abrupt, shaky, filled with digital artefacts and visual glitches." (Berry, 2017, p. 134) which debatably also adds to this sense of intimacy and realism that many content consumers may be looking for in mobile videos.

Mobile videos can also be shared and promote social interaction between people. In "Theorizing Mobile Communication in the Intimate Sphere" Rich Ling (2014) emphasizes that the use of mobile communications has facilitated expanded social interaction. Being able to create and send texts, images or videos on mobile phones has allowed us to be able to communicate with those who are miles away from us. Similarly, Lee Humphreys (2012) states that there are three forms of social interactions that can be promoted by mobile social networks: connecting, coordinating, and cataloging (2012, p. 494). The definitions are as follows, "(C)onnecting allows us to manage inner space or social distance with others. Coordinating allows us to manage

outer space or our physical distance from others. Lastly, cataloguing allows us to manage metaspace or our informational distance from others." (Humphreys, 2012, p. 501). These concepts are important as they guided me in navigating how I can achieve some form of social interaction within my own project and will be referenced later in this paper.

Project Overview, Final Project Development, & Improvements

My three-minute mobile video project, "Follow Me Around: Mini Philly Tour", visually takes my audience with me on a two-day trip where I tour some parts of the city of Philadelphia with my family. In the video, viewers join me as I visit the Philadelphia Museum of Art, in addition to other sight-seeing locations such as Elfreth Alley, and Schuylkill Park. Within the video, I use narrative audio to recount the attractions that I saw. Additionally, I share some interesting facts to inform and educate my audience on what they may find in the City of Brotherly Love, and the significance of these sights to the city, and nation as a whole.

I decided to expand upon my mobile video project by further demonstrating the power of mobile video in facilitating mediated social interaction and online social engagement. I decided to do this by creating a second episode to my "Follow Me Around" series. The second episode of my video series, "Follow Me Around: Day in the Life of a College Student", offers viewers a more intimate view into my personal life as they join me on an average, yet rather messy day as a college student.

To create my videos, I filmed a variation of shots using my mobile phone and edited the shots together on Adobe's Premiere Rush, a mobile video editing application. When editing, I utilized some graphic texts in the beginning of my videos to provide my audience with the video title. This is used to immediately attract the audience's attention by giving them an idea of what the video is about, so they feel invited to continue watching. I improved my projects by also adding texts throughout the videos to establish locations and add additional information. This was done to make heavy information consumption a little easier for my audiences. Finally, to keep the video audibly enticing, I placed some background music. A major improvement made to the audio of my first video, for the sake of clarity, was slowing down the voice-over, and adjusting my script such that I only cover the main points.

When creating my project, it was crucial for me to try and keep the videos short, quick paced, and sweet. This is due to Omar et. al's discussion of studies which suggested that mobile videos must be short in order to "sustain the attention of viewers." (2020, p. 121). Like TikTok videos in the app's most recent update, my own videos hit the 3-minute mark each and are incredibly fast paced to keep up with the ongoing decrease in attention spans among mobile users.

Project Goals

My videos express the concept of mobility in their mode of delivery. Filmed in portrait mode, the videos are designed to take over an entire 6:9 screen when played, this was done to keep the audience visually immersed in the content and decrease the

likelihood of loss of interest as a result of other online content peeking through the corners of the screen. Additionally, my projects demonstrate mobility in its creation process as I used a portable, hand-held device that allowed me to take videos of my day-to-day life.

When deciding on whether my videos should be filmed in portrait or landscape, a large factor that influenced my decision to go with portrait mode is that the attribute of mobile devices being hand-held allows the creators content to appear and feel much more real for the audience. As Berry states, mobile phones video footage were incorporated into many news channels in order to give a sense of authenticity and reliability to their content. Audience would also feel much more engaged and immersed when viewing footage taken by an individual who is demonstrably trying to show everything around them rather than one specific cut of a scene or event (Berry, 2017, p. 135). I tried to demonstrate this in my own project as I show my audiences everything I am seeing while I tour the city or go about my day. This also explains the excessive use of pans, tilts, and cuts in my video as I not only tried to reveal as many shots as I can for the viewer's perspectives, but also attempted to give them a view into what my own eyes would naturally see as I looked around certain sites and locations.

For a project that was created with the intention of being consumed on mobile social networking platforms, like TikTok and IGTV, I was heavily influenced by Omar and Dequan's findings on the motivations of TikTok use, especially as their research may be applied to any platform similar to TikTok. In their paper, Omar et al explain that

"people are motivated to use social media to peek into other people's lives." (Omar & Dequan, 2020, p. 125). While I give audiences a peek into my life, a sense of intimacy is heightened with the inclusion of shots where I share private information and talk straight to the camera at unflattering angles – the same way I would address my own friends in a video message. By doing this, I am offering my audience a sense of pleasure by allowing them to access private details about my life (Omar & Dequan, 2020, p. 125). Directly addressing an audience also creates this sense of having a para-social relationship as the audience cannot respond to me in real-time but can only comment on the experiences I share *after* I've shared them. Furthermore, this video series comments on mobile social interaction and engagement as, in its core, the video was created to be viewed, commented upon, liked, and shared with other people on social platforms.

To expand upon the theme of social engagement within my project, I decided to improve my videos by leveraging my use of voice-overs and directly requesting that my audience engage with the video they're watching. This is done through the inclusion of phrases such as, "comment what your go-to coffee order is…" and "make sure to hit that like button…".

What makes the second episode of my series particularly effective in cultivating social engagement is the video's ability to provide viewers with experiences they can personally relate to. Through my own self-expression, which has been integrated in my videos through sharing my thoughts and intimate details from my day, I am able to "cultivate supportive connections." (Omar & Dequan, 2020, 125). Audiences that share

the similar experience of being a college student can respond to my video with comments regarding their own thoughts, to bond over shared experiences.

Finally, my project demonstrates the concept of social interaction in its adherence to concepts such as civility, inner, and outer space. Civility is "'the activity which protects people from each other and yet allows them to enjoy each other's company'" (Sennett,1976, p. 246, as cited in Humphreys, 2012, p. 497). As demonstrated in my project, my use of mobile video to communicate allows me to be physically distant and protected from strangers, whilst still interacting with them. The concepts of inner and outer space are exemplified here in the way my video offers a sense of "connection" through the social intimacy present between myself and viewers (inner space). While I socially appear close to my audience, my outer space is physically distant – this demonstrates the spatial mobility of social interactions within mobile videos as a whole.

Conclusion

To sum up, mobile videos allow for the creation of earnest and authentic visual content from any one place in the world. Mobile videos also allow for the mobility of the content itself all the way from the creator to the viewer. Within this exchange - of a video travelling from the maker to the audience - the ability to socially interact and connect is exhibited with viewers having the ability to not only consume entertainment and information, but also share, react, and comment upon the video they're watching.

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