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AN EXPERIENTIAL EFFECT FROM CHARISMATIC ENCOUNTERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the experiential effect upon students who encounter charismatic educators via videotaped interviews conducted by typical students. The tutorial effect on viewers is unusually stimulating because viewers feel a surrogate relationship with the interviewers. Also described is the process for creating such video documentaries as a respectable publishing medium. The various benefits from alternative modes of using those video experiences relate to different need situations so that the utility of video-documentaries can be matched to diverse objectives. An institution dedicated to facilitate production and distribution of such media has been established and is available to all faculty.

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the benefits to viewers (and producers) of experiential video documentaries. A video- documentary is an edited videotape record of an informal encounter between a respected expert and some knowledgeable novices. A series of such video documentaries has been produced and installed in a basic business course. Several thousand viewings by students has shed light on the experiential benefits which accrue from carefully edited videotape showing a group of students asking typical questions and receiving enlightening answers from a charismatic educator with a notable record of research and publication. A new publishing medium in this video form shows considerable promise as a means for editor- producers to create (as a scholarly endeavor) enduring and stimulating experiential instruments. A production and distribution institution for such creative works has been established to provide a service to prospective producers and users.

TUTORIAL EXPERIENCES

Sitting at the knee of a famous personality is a "turn-on" experience. Students are almost awe-struck in the presence of a live well-known author or widely footnoted researcher. A famous and highly respected dignitary can literally charm students, inciting them to deeper involvement with issues.

However, such inspired interaction is a rare opportunity that only the more serious students can enjoy. Charismatic teachers and researchers are usually affiliated with the most prestigious institutions. They are cloistered in "ivory towers" where their productivity grows in importance but shrinks relative to personal contacts with impressionable students. The charisma is seldom felt by the novices who are exposed only to "sterile" print in books and articles authored by these leaders.

Not only is charisma rare, it is available only temporarily; it endures only through the peak of a career. During the period of acclaim, the work of a charismatic leader is widely read. Afterward, while footnotes and reference citations linger, the once great contributor recedes into obscure history as the essence of contributions are successively distilled and

blended with newer works of others.

Such a charismatic person may be recognized as a "living treasure", but the charismatic benefit, limited in time and place, is seldom captured and preserved for posterity. Modern technology has grown beyond that of Gutenberg's press, so that the flaming personalities of charismatic leaders can be shared widely. Video technology is applicable to this educational need.

A video experience can be considerably more than passive. Viewers are drawn into a video displayed situation when it includes things to which they can relate and identify. A familiar kind of place or a group of peers in the situation establishes a vicarious experience for a viewer. Although the dignitary in such a situation inspires awe, empathy can also be aroused in a viewer.

CREATING AN EXPERIENTIAL ENCOUNTER

Identifying a charismatic leader in some discipline is rather easy. Such people can often be recognized as authors of original theory or widely adopted texts. Their fame is most usually attributed to their scholarly work, although their vibrant personality is key. Their careers have matured and their interests have mellowed to include concern for promulgation of important ideas. The opportunity to reach successive generations of students is at least ego inflating if not exciting for altruistic reasons. Consequently, they can be expected to accept an invitation for such exposure quite readily.

Students who anticipate a face-to-face encounter with a live dignitary are enthused and they delve into depth study in advance of the event. They formulate intriguing questions which focus on the essence of important issues. Associates of these prospective interviewers aid in this endeavor even though primary responsibility is not shared. The result is both intensive and extensive preparation for the videotaping session.

After the live encounter (from which an edited video-documentary evolves) those students (and faculty) who were involved, either actively or passively, are likely to be significantly moved. Many pursue rather serious investigations into print media that would otherwise seem dull to them. Librarians report "runs" on works of the recent visitor and requests for other works which may have been cited. Such interest persists well beyond the time of the visit, as discussion among students (and faculty) continues. Those students who assist in the editorial process that creates a condensed videodocumentary from the "raw videotape" especially notice this after-effect.

The experiential impact also reverberates through other places than the site of the interview if the creative process includes consulting editors in the field. Such consultations involve viewing of the "raw videotape" to identify preferred sequences and their order in a compressed videodocumentary. Often, consulting editors

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share this role with their students, thus magnifying the experiential benefit even during the creative phase. A Delphi technique for sharing and enriching the recommendations in this editorial process further stimulates enthusiastic involvement with content issues.

THE EXPERIENTIAL VIDEODOCUMENTARY

An experiential videodocumentary is a compact moving image record depicting important views and the personality of their proponent. The experiential impact on viewers is attributable to several features. For example, the interest of the viewer is maintained at a high level by limiting the videodocument's duration to the typical attention span of about twenty minutes. In addition, the complexity of material presented is controlled by the informality of oral delivery uncomplicated by graphics. The fascination for the viewer develops from the charming personal characteristics of the dignitary, which may even be seen as unusual idiosyncrasies.

Because a raw videotape is likely to include numerous important issues, its compression (often by a factor of one-tenth) produces a videodocumentary with a very high information density. The editing process takes out not only the least important issues but even the non-essential phrases in questions and responses. The result is a high quality "tight dialog" including a few well-elucidated major issues and a series of secondary ideas. Introducing a broad variety of issues, even without expansive elaboration, in "rapid-fire" style often challenges a viewer who might still be absorbing the last new idea while the next one is being raised. This tends to draw the viewer into a "rewind and replay" approach to improve comprehension. To permit total concentration on watching and to facilitate note-taking a written transcript of the soundtrack is useful.

Viewing a videodocumentary has the effect of reinforcing the textbook and lecture issues of a course. The dignitary whose theories are cited in textbooks imparts a living quality to otherwise bland abstract prose. The fact that the originator is explaining the issues informally provides a "straight-from-the-horses-mouth" credibility. In addition, a "new face" saying the same things that the text and lecture have said is reinforcing. Indeed, the instructor gains considerable credibility and respect as the "expert" seems to be repeating exactly the wisdom and opinions of the instructor. If the course is using a text authored by the personality on videotape, then these benefits are even more intense, and each student reads the text with a feeling of acquaintance with the author.

If the videodocumentary touches on issues that had not yet been encountered in the course, then the instructor has the opportunity to promote deeper discussion about them. Even if the issues were already covered, the new viewpoint is often sufficient cause to reopen discussion for deeper probes. New and fuller understandings are seen to result from this enhancement of classroom activities.

Although a videodocumentary provides more than just a historical record of theories and personality, that archive value is significant. These moving images of noted scholars explaining their theories can be an important adjunct to their formal writings long after they die. Often the personal explanation provides an insight which the written record does not impart. There are already examples of a noted

author drawing attention to misunderstood written works and lucidly setting the issues straight.¹

This videodocumentary approach has been tried by several editor-producers in scattered locations, in some instances the results have been lost because no library had been established. However, there is now a not-for-profit institution responsible for preserving such materials in perpetuity and making them available at nominal cost generally. Any videodocuments that exist should be deposited in this national archive. Titles already available include notables in the disciplines of accounting, economics, finance, management, marketing and systems science.

ALTERNATIVE MODES OF USE

There are alternative modes for using a videodocumentary. All modes of use provoke viewers to pursue deeper study by exposing ideas interestingly. In addition, each mode has unique characteristics that address special needs. Among the utilization modes, there are site alternatives of classroom or library viewing, and for each site there are viewing alternatives of interrupted or continuous sequence before discussing individual issues.

There are several common benefits among all modes of utilization. For example, benefits arise from preparation assignments for cursory research into the background of the leader to be viewed. Also, during the viewing experience, viewers are likely to feel a certain quality of "being there" in time and place as they "participate" in the interview even though the surrogate students within the tape actually ask the questions. Subsequent discussions among students and instructor add more benefit to the experience. Reading regularly assigned course materials become more intense, as the students feel that the dignitary is "known" personally. This is especially true if the dignitary is also the author of the course text.

Another benefit common to all modes of use is the freedom from "pressure" that each vicarious interviewer enjoys. The sensation of being the interviewer (by identifying with the surrogate interviewing student) is exciting yet the "on-the-spot" obligations are avoided by viewers. Thus, the benefit is available without paying this cost.

If the videodocument is viewed in a classroom setting, the instructor has good control of the viewing experience and the discussion about the issue raised. Because of mass viewing, spontaneous discussion is likely to include a large diversity of points raised by students; many questions and comments can be expressed in a mass viewing situation. An instructor can be confident that all of the important issues are fully covered by classroom treatment.

If the viewing is by individuals or small groups in a library setting, then viewers have the flexibility to get the experiential benefit at times most suitable to them. In small group viewing, discussion among students is likely to be less inhibited. If discussion in a classroom is subsequent to private viewing in a library, then the ideas have had time to develop and mature within each participant so that discussion will be enriched. Such private viewing also allows self-pacing

¹ Koontz, Harold, "Retrospective Comment; The Management Theory Jungle", in Boone & Bowen (Eds.), The Great Writings in Management and Organizational Behavior, (pps 1980).

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and without contamination of conflictive comments until all issues are well thought-out.

If discussion is delayed until the entire videodocumentary is experienced, then the viewers' rapt attention is insured and the instructor has good control of a well structured discussion. When classroom time is stringently limited, the efficiency of this method may be preferred. This format for discussion in class is almost a necessity with library viewing.

If discussion is structure in relation to individual segments as they are experienced, then the situation can be expected to be more lively and spontaneous. Each issue is able to arouse an enthusiastic response without losing any opportunities for important discussion. This discussion mode may preclude library viewing, unless the videodocumentary is programmed for automatic stops at critical points where questions are posed for personal (or small group) consideration.

REPORTED BENEFITS

Several videodocumentary titles have been in use at numerous institutions for the past three years. Reports from instructors and students alike have been very positive and have identified general benefits of this kind of experiential encounter. Many of the comments were solicited from students and include both anonymous and voluntarily identified responses. Other comments were self-initiated and aimed at encouraging the continuation of the project which had produced the initial titles.

Faculty who have been using the videodocumentaries report that the content is replete with topics for depth discussion. The discussion about issues introduced in a twenty minute videodocumentary can easily require three class periods, in the opinion of some users. Instructors have also noted that many students are so impressed by the experience that they seek out even obscure publications related to the issues. Some instructors have reported that they themselves have been significantly stimulated by the experience and have expanded their interest to broader aspects of their discipline.

Students have noted heightened enthusiasm for courses and their instructors as a result of these experiences. They express gratitude to their instructors for arranging the opportunity of the experience. They indicate appreciation for the willingness of instructors to use modern and imaginative approaches in the delivery of courses.

PUBLISHING OPPORTUNITIES

The opportunity for creating a videodocumentary exists in most universities. The studio and equipment facilities need not be elaborate to produce quite satisfactory results. Frequently the educational television or public broadcasting facilities (along with their professional staff) can be used. But even less sophisticated approaches are also effective. If physical and staff resources are available a well regarded charismatic leader is not usually hard to attract.

Specific advice for structuring the taping session can be readily obtained from those who have previously produced videodocumentaries occasional workshops are offered by the facilitating institution to explain techniques and to share production ideas. Technical editing service is offered to authors and distribution opportunities can also be provided by the facilitating institution. Archival retention is another service provided. Consultation is available on issues of legal protection as well.

Other creative opportunities continually arise for author-editors interested in publishing in this medium. For example,

raw tape of past encounters includes numerous segments not used in existing videodocumentaries. These frequently contain nearly identical questions on key issues for which answers are unique. Consequently, various new videodocumentaries could address these issues by combining the answers of several dignitaries to the same questions. This re-editing process could produce very useful works. Other editing opportunities can be described.

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