

Review on user generated activism content media essay

[Media](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Yang Xinyan AlexisDCT4C 13816

Review on User-Generated Activism Content and Relevance to Design Activism Today

Theme: Design Activism

Resource: Occupy Wall Street: A Short Documentary
(Youtube video link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkBMrFE9p0g>)

The literature in question is a video about a viral campaign called " Occupy", specifically the Occupy Wall Street event that happened in the United States of America on 17 September 2011. This review will focus on five key elements of activism that can be derived from the video, namely, statistical evidence; narrative evidence; mass media; new media; and public demonstrations. We will look specifically into how these elements are relevant to design activism techniques and impact, which is the scope of my research.

Before going in-depth into the literature review, we must first understand the origin of the resource. It is a user-generated video uploaded on the popular video-sharing website, Youtube. The originator of this video is an advertising company based in America called Reel Advertisements specialising in " viral marketing; people, product and event promotion and brand development." Thus, it is crucial to keep in mind that although the footage is a primary source of information, the video has been edited and may be a subjective presentation of the situation. Finally, the video only gives statistical background information and obtained images about Occupy Wall Street and does not contain footage of the event itself, but rather only the marching that occurred in late September against the actions taken by the police during Occupy Wall Street.

<https://assignbuster.com/review-on-user-generated-activism-content-media-essay/>

Statistical Evidence

A very prominent persuasive technique used early in the video is to present alarming statistics and facts; this is a very crucial component to create awareness and convince more people to join in the cause. Immediately after the introduction of the video, background information about the Occupy Wall Street movement is disseminated in the form of sourced images, numbers and infographics and continues on for at least one-third of the entire video. However, the video gives no source to this information (as is typical in most user-generated videos), so the viewer is to assume that the information is accurate at the time of its release.

Perloff (2003, p. 184) stated that ‘ Statistics also can evoke heuristics like " An argument backed by numbers is probably correct."’ Presenting facts and figures makes the author seem knowledgeable about the subject and therefore increases the validity of his opinion. An example of a campaign that relied heavily on a well-designed video is The Girl Effect: The Clock is Ticking. It uses uncluttered, simple graphics with concise figures to communicate its message. Also, it is coupled with dramatic music that greatly accentuates the impact. This infographic video has garnered over a million views and has even been featured on TED.

The flip-side to using statistics is that it is very easy to manipulate them in such a way that it wholly supports your point of view. For example in the case of design, in infographics such as graphs, one can change the scale of the graph such that differences can look dramatic or insignificant, depending on the position advocated. Design tactics can be employed to skew infographics in favour of that position, such as altering the hierarchy of elements such that the viewer will likely see those set of data first or illegible font or colour choice. One can also choose to omit certain variables in their data, present outdated or unsubstantiated data, or even fabricate data. However, Green and Brock (2000) argued that statistics can be dull and overwhelming for the viewer, especially if there are too many figures to digest. Their view is that statistics do not have the compelling strength or interpersonal connection of narrative evidence, and is thus less persuasive.

Narrative Evidence

The entire video was presented through the first-person perspective and footage following the statistical evidence was taken on-site, and thus considered a primary source. This kind of narrative evidence impacts the viewer on a more emotional level and hence, more engaging than its statistical counterpart. Based on the Transportation Theory (Green & Brock 2000), narrations have the ability to ‘transport’ the audience into the narrator’s perspective. This leads the viewer to sympathise with the author’s point of view and distance himself from reality or real-world facts. The quality of the narrative evidence thus falls on how emotionally moving it can affect the viewer, possibly to the extent that the viewer enters "complete transportation"-the epitome commanding full attention.

Sensationalising narratives can become a very poignant method in design activism. A very recent example of using design sensationalism in a narrative was the well-know KONY 2012 video. It utilizes impactful narrative techniques, impressive visuals, as well as powerful images and typography. For example, it opens strongly with a very serious tone and images of the Earth and a clock counting down. These strong visual cues suggest without verbalizing, respectively, that this is a serious issue that (may or may not) affect the world, time is running out and the issue must be addressed immediately. The organiser makes it very personal when he presents video footage of his son’s birth and childhood as well as his journalism-style video logs, thus the ‘transportation’ connection is established.

Alternatively, it was suggested that vivid narrative evidence may be either too confusing for the audience, or too vivid that it undermines the evidence and the message becomes lost. (Frey & Eagly 1993) Whilst videos like these may be crafted successful, the true success of activism lies in the number of people it is able to reach out to, and traditionally information is broadcasted through means of mass media.

Mass Media

In the video, the narrator lamented about the lack of coverage of Occupy Wall Street in mainstream media, hinting that it was under strict control of the authorities that were being protested against. Brennen (2006) agrees that "ties among mainstream media, government, and business have compromised American democracy". Additionally, proponents of Occupy Wall Street have criticized the mainstream media for criminalizing their protests and behaviour (Bennett, 2003), thus the view that the supposedly objective mainstream media is ironically biased for government propaganda. In spite of such strong views, many people still rely on official mass media for their news such as newspapers and television. All in all, official media has to uphold its reputation and is obligated to checking its information against other reliable sources for accuracy.

However, it can still adjust certain design elements such as coverage space, size of photograph and headers to express its perceived 'biasness'. Despite the fact that design was traditionally published via mass media, the rising popularity of new media as a viable alternative has led to a stronger reliance on it as a platform for mass communication.

New Media

<https://assignbuster.com/review-on-user-generated-activism-content-media-essay/>

The key difference between the first two examples stated in the video (French Revolution and the Independence of India) and the third (Egyptian Protests) was the proliferation of new media and the internet in the latter. The video itself was produced by a citizen and uploaded on the popular video sharing website Youtube. The internet has allowed information to be shared almost instantly and on a global scale. It is very easy to one to disseminate information and for others to share that information. This escalates to what is called an information cascade. People may eventually stop relying on their own information or opinion in favour of what has been presented to them through new media. (Sunstien 2003)

Design activism has relied heavily on new media in the 21st century to broadcast to a global audience. Historically, design was limited to print media, and geographical constraints make it difficult for communication to spread quickly. Now, much of design has taken on digital counterparts which can be accessed instantly at the click of the mouse or a tap of the finger. A fine example would be David Goh's Ethics for the Starving Designer. Although the manifesto is published in print, it is also available on the internet and people from all over the world are able to sign in support of the manifesto.

Social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have become increasingly popular as communities made of real people with similar ideologies come together in a virtual space. The protestors in Egypt relied on such websites to discuss and organise their mass demonstrations together without police intervention. (Alexander 2011) Israeli graphic designer Ronny Edry started an online movement to spread his peace posters featuring the words "Iranians we will never bomb your country we [heart] you.", and soon peace-advocating Facebook groups such as "Israel [hearts] Iran" and "Palestine [hearts] Israel" started to grow rapidly. Clearly, design activism will benefit greatly from the power of mass media.

In addition to the efficiency of mass broadcast, new media has also given more power to the people. Instead of just being the recipient of information, everyone becomes part of the dialogue. As Witt (2004b, p. 3) puts it, "Citizens, who are so much a part of the public journalism philosophy, no longer have to be invited into the mix. They are part of the mix." Sunstien (2003, p. 97) also argues that the free speech principle protects people from voicing opposing views from government punishment to a certain extent.

Because of this lack of regulation, many may perceive the content to be raw and candidly honest. Conversely, while mainstream media has a responsibility to only post credible information, the unregulated and unaccountable nature of user-generated content are often highly subjective. Therein exists the dichotomy of having genuine opinions from the ground as well as biased and unreliable accounts. However, where virtual presence is concerned, a furious online petition will not have the same level of impact and involvement as a mass public demonstration of the same scale.

Public Demonstrations

The Occupy movement was huge, not just because it tapped extensively on online presence, but mostly because it was a public mass demonstration. Being physically involved puts it worlds apart in terms of involvement from online protests. Actions cause real-world physical impact and demands attention from both mass media and new media, both online and offline. Many causes are more successful if they take place in real public spaces, because the organizers will not be the only ones reporting their demonstration; the surrounding audience and reporters will also engage in their forms of journalism of the spectacle, so news travels even faster than from a single source. Furthermore, the heightened atmosphere may influence the audience to either join in the cause or in other cases, be affected by it emotionally or physically. Improv Everywhere is a present example that embodies this Situationist concept. Although they do not perform acts out of promoting a cause per se, the methodology and effect is similar: it causes a spectacle that is almost impossible to ignore.

In the design context, it is imperative to understand the strength of the human element in relation to their collaterals. For example, a protest sign held fervently by an Occupy Wall Street protestor would not have the same impact if it were a standalone on a wall or just an image posted on the internet.

Another great advantage that the Occupy movement had was its transnational coverage, which garnered more support and communication on a global scale. A comprehensive study showed that " groups with transnational ties enabled transnational exchange of various kinds by producing newsletters and websites that provided information about the work of activists in various countries as well as by bringing activists from different countries for speaking tours and other forms of direct transnational contacts." (Davis et al. 2005) Rallies occurring across the globe reinforce their respective Occupy movement, thus promoting macro cohesiveness under the umbrella name " Occupy", regardless of the specific cause. In conclusion, this video is a prime example of user-generated content utilizing new media to spread and communicate its message. A very important idea to keep in mind is that like advertising, design activism requires one to sell the idea and convince the audience before it can proliferate. All forms of activism, including design activism, will benefit greatly from a combined use of crafting techniques, social participation and media advantages.-End of Essay-