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CINEMATOGRAPHY AND CASE VIDEOS: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON SELECTION AND TEACHING

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In considering case videos, instructors typically focus primarily on the content of the case. We suggest also considering the theories and techniques of film to enhance the pedagogical impact of video cases. Even unmotivated students may find themselves progressively engaged with an effectively produced video. We note, however, that cinematographic techniques will not compensate for weak substance in a case. We also contend that resource limitations for producing and distributing case videos have hindered their development. Only when substantial resources, effort, and filmmaking skill are put into making effective case videos will they begin to approach their potential as useful and powerful educational tools.

In this article, we explore the role of cinematographic techniques in the selection and possible development of case videos. We contend that the video medium has unique advantages for the case method that have only been partially developed. To support our contention, we explain the merits and the use of three concepts that may be new to case teachers: percepts and concepts, "erotic narration" (i.e., questioning strategies), and variable framing.

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Previous Research

Kinnunen and Ramamurti (1987) suggest seven principal benefits that can be obtained from video cases that contain question and answer sessions with senior executives. These advantages include elaborations and updates of case issues, watching chief executive officer's (CEO's) talk about their jobs, adding realism to words on pieces of paper, adding credibility to themes that occur in the strategic management literature, appreciating the importance of intangible factors, highlighting the complexity of a general manager's job, and providing a basis for discussion of additional issues.

Gallos (1993) suggests using several popular movies to help students in reframing and exploring situations from multiple perspectives. She contends that films and videos can be powerful vehicles for teaching students conceptual flexibility and the ability to shift perspectives. Huczynski (1994) suggests a sequence from the movie *The Magnificent Seven* to illustrate two areas: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory of Motivation and Kipnis, Schmidt, Swaffin-Smith, and Wilkenson's work on influencing strategies. Many textbook authors offer videos and supporting written material with their textbooks. *Management Live: The Video Book* by Marx, Jick, and Frost (1991) appears to be the most developed example. They use videos to convey emotions. Clips of movies and interviews of prominent personalities are offered along with extensive written supporting materials.

In this article, we extend previous research by examining how a knowledge of cinematography can improve the selection of case videos. Our suggestions are also applicable to the development of new case videos.

Cinematographic Techniques and Case Videos

Offerings of case videos have grown significantly. The *Harvard Business School 1995-1996 Catalog of Teaching Materials* (1995) lists 242 videos covering 15 subject areas. The *Harvard Business School 1995-1996 Catalog of New Teaching Materials Supplement* (1995) lists 38 case videos. The selection of these and other case videos can be improved by examination of film techniques. These include: (a) percepts and concepts, (b) erotetic narration, and (c) variable framing.

PERCEPTS AND CONCEPTS

Visual media in general present percepts—two-dimensional imagery whose meaning is inherently ambiguous. A picture of anything, whether still or moving, can mean almost anything to anyone. Indeed, the old saw that a

picture is worth a thousand words contains some truth: A picture requires a thousand words (or more) to explain its conceptual meaning. As Immanuel Kant said, concepts without percepts are empty, whereas percepts without concepts are blind (Gould, 1995, p. 148). And, as Susanne Langer (1951) points out, visual media are presentational and symbolic forms, as opposed to language, which is discursive:

Language in the strict sense is essentially discursive; it has permanent units of meaning which are combinable into larger units; it has fixed equivalences that make definition and translation possible. . . . In all these salient characteristics it differs from wordless symbolism (images) which is non-discursive and untranslatable, does not allow of definitions within its own system, and cannot directly convey generalities. (p. 89)

Hence, the conceptual meaning of video images must be conveyed with a variety of cinematic strategies: voice-over narration, juxtaposed images and objects, camera angles, lighting, and so on. Onscreen objects, characters, and action must be manipulated to convey specific concepts; otherwise they contain highly ambiguous and open-ended meanings.

Of course, the meaning that a director intends will not be the only one that is communicated in any specific shot, scene, or sequence. Some viewers may be affected by specific objects, facial expressions, or articles of clothing that other viewers hardly notice. This is inevitable and offers a major challenge for anyone using videos to convey concepts. In a classroom setting, viewers may not get the important concepts at all, so concepts must be explained, either in print supplements or in a lecture before, during (using freeze-frame), or after viewing.

An understanding of the radical difference between concepts, which are carried in language and are the very heart of academic learning, and percepts, which are reflected in images and are the central component of videos, is essential to understanding and teaching using classroom videos.

EROTETIC NARRATION

Effective case videos integrate language and visual images using two narrative cinematographic techniques: erotetic narration and variable framing. Contemporary film writer Noel Carroll (1988) coined the phrase erotetic narration. An effective visual presentation will raise a variety of questions, both macro and micro, that viewers will feel compelled to watch unfold as the narrative progresses.

The well-known movie and extensively used video case *12 Angry Men* is an example of how percepts and concepts are developed through erotetic

narration. In the first 4 minutes of the film, the director creates a variety of percepts that are edited and framed to provoke questions: What are these highly somber and serious men thinking? What legal judgment will they be required to make? What will be the outcome? Viewers cannot help but be drawn into the action by these questions. They become intrigued by the implied potential meanings contained in the percepts. This is serious business—the legal work of the state that literally means life or death to the accused.

Indeed, the courthouse pillars loom over the viewer like a huge, implacable wall of concrete and marble in the very first shot. Inside, the courthouse is shown as a busy, official place full of people doing the work of the state. There are no conversations or smiles, no close-ups of faces that might invite warmer judgments of the proceedings.

Toward the end of the opening 4-minute sequence, viewer engagement is heightened by close-ups of the accused with the jury in the background. Here, a major conflict and question arises for viewers. The close-ups (both a side and frontal close-up, much like a mug shot) of the accused reveal him to be a mere boy. He also has the features of an innocent: His expression bespeaks dignity rather than hostility and his face seems passive, almost like he has given up. Clearly, this face does not fit the expectation of an accused cold-blooded murderer.

Hence, the question, Can this childlike boy actually be guilty of any serious crime? Most viewers are fully engaged with this overriding question, thanks to the film's skillfully edited and framed percepts with the implied concept of justice and whether it gets fairly applied by *12 Angry Men*.

Because editing is a crucial element in retaining viewer interest, it merits further discussion here. Editing is the linking of shots, including those filmed out of sequence. To use an analogy, editing is the assembly of the phrases and clauses used to construct the sentences, paragraphs, and chapters of the video (Huss & Silverstein, 1968, p. 56). One problem with case videos concerns the lack of funds for studio editing. "Editing in the camera," which is used in most field cases, involves shooting scenes in the order in which they appear in the final film and shooting only one take of each scene. Using this approach means giving up the control that can be exercised in the editing room. For Hollywood films, the edited footage shot by multiple cameras from various viewpoints may be greater than 10 times the final film length. Documentary filmmakers without scripts and story boards may have 90 to 1 ratios. When multiple possibilities for a story line exist, many are filmed with the final choice delayed until the film is being edited. The same action also may be filmed several times from several takes to get different camera angles and positions. A backup number of cutaways are needed for unexpected problems

in maintaining continuity. Obviously, this level of effort is very costly, even when offering a fictional representation of a case. When movies or clips from movies are adapted for cases, they often feature the advantages of professional talent and major resources that can intensify a learning experience. Fictional representations in cinematographically sophisticated films have a much greater effect on viewers than documentary video cases do.

A crucial aspect of directing viewers' attention involves dialogue. Whoever is speaking draws viewer attention and, most often, directors will center the speaker onscreen, or will frame other characters' reactions to the speech onscreen, or will alternate between the speaker and listeners' reactions.

The best dialogue for impact and immediate comprehension is head-to-head confrontation (Blacker, 1988) rather than multiple occasional contributors, as in a roundtable discussion. Writing for television stresses dialogue that is understandable on a single hearing because no hard copy is available to viewers (Kaufman, 1969, p. 53). Moreover, dialogue must be kept lean without losing clarity, yet still capture the speech patterns and rhythms of each character (Kaufman, 1969, p. 55).

Thus, skillfully written dialogue amounts to an art form, and speakers in video cases usually are not presenting professionally written dialogue. Instead, they are passing along information, giving instructions, or speaking their mind on some immediate issue using whatever language skills they naturally possess. Hence, dialogue in video cases tends to be spontaneous and authentic, close to the documentary feel of the vast majority of non-Hollywood video cases. Even with the best speakers, however, such dialogue cannot be compared to the artful language that originates with professional writers.

Instructors using such cases can and should help students discern whether speakers' dialogue enhances their credibility by examining eye contact, voice quality, tone of voice, articulation, knowledge exhibited, and clarity of ideas. Student viewers are usually intuitively tuned into whether they trust and believe a speaker or whether they feel doubtful, and these reactions usually arise from dialogue. Thus, discussing dialogue in terms of speakers' credibility can be both useful and enlightening.

VARIABLE FRAMING

Variable framing is the major means of creating questions that establish the degree of viewer interest in a story. Briefly, variable framing refers to a variety of editing, framing, and camera movements that enables a filmmaker to direct viewer attention.

When viewers need to notice an expression, an object, or a movement, the director can edit in a close-up, move the camera in, or even use a zoom shot. Thus, viewer attention need never lag; a director always has some means of framing what viewers need to see to maintain their interest. In other words, the ongoing question-answer process in film is supported and developed by variable framing; these two features together give film and video their sustained power to generate and hold viewer attention.

Can a case video capture and maintain student attention? The effective use of variable framing is a key criterion.

GUIDELINES FOR USING CINEMATOGRAPHIC TECHNIQUES TO ASSIST IN CASE VIDEO SELECTION

1. Is erotetic narration skillfully used?

Does the video imply or state questions about onscreen characters, meaning motivations, and outcomes? Are there macro questions mixed with micro questions? Are answers to the questions given all at once or slowly, so as to maintain interest? Do some of the answers imply more questions? Does the video raise and answer questions that are appropriately broad or narrow given the subject? Are some questions raised without being answered? Should the video have used more questions?

2. How well is variable framing used for viewer interest? For needed information?

Does the video shift angles and distance from objects or people at a reasonable pace to maintain viewer interest? Does the video give information by framing objects or people in different, surprising, or interesting ways? Is more information implied beyond the given frame? Is that information given quickly, delayed, or omitted?

3. Will the video case or series really stand alone?

Is more supporting material needed and, if so, how much and what kind? Are the context and outcomes adequately explained? Could viewers act with confidence on the information presented in the video?

4. Is technical quality adequate?

How is the sound? The lighting? The music? The number of cameras? The close-ups? The camera placement? The camera angles? Do you strain to hear and see at any point? Are there any unclear images or edits? If so, is the lack of clarity explainable or is it merely a technical error? Do the technical

problems add up to substantial distractions or can they be overlooked because of the quality of the information presented? Remember that if you show a video on large screen, difficulties will be magnified. One strong suggestion is to test the video on the machine to be used, viewing it from different parts of the room to be used.

5. *Does the video reflect the issues?*

Does the video represent the conflicts and turning points in the situation under scrutiny? Is the role of the principle characters accurately depicted? Is the emphasis skewed in some questionable direction?

6. *Is there a balance between percepts and concepts?*

Does the video contain concepts that are developed and embodied in images (i.e., percepts)? Should there be more concepts? Fewer? More percepts? Fewer? Were there many percepts that exist with no, inadequate, or vague explanatory concepts?

7. *Are the human interactions captured?*

As we have shown, success in capturing human interactions varies tremendously. Hollywood movies and some case videos do well. Others require management and voice-overs. Instructors must pay careful attention to the depiction of human interaction as it may be unclear. For example, a voice-over is needed in the *Churchill Tableware* case video to tell viewers that no action will be taken until three brothers who own the company agree on what to do.

Conclusion

Percepts and concepts, erotetic narration, and variable framing are the strategies that create films and offer a useful means of judging the effectiveness of virtually any classroom video. Unfortunately, though the field of video cases is large and diverse, the majority of video cases do not fully use the potential of these strategies to create effective visual presentations. Cases using quality cinematographic techniques, or suitable adoptions of movies or television clips, are relatively rare. To approach their potential as useful and powerful educational tools, effective case videos require substantial resources, effort, and filmmaking skill. Given the lack of financial return—relative to cost—for such videos, we can only remain hopeful that a modest number of case videos of high quality and effectiveness will continue to be produced.

Appendix Case Videos Examined

Classroom Presentations

People's express. (1985). Available from Harvard Business School Publishing, Catalog No. 9-885-516.

Motown productions: Suzanne De Passe, President. (1987). Available from Harvard Business School Publishing, Catalog No. 9-889-508.

General Motors Corporation: Modernizing the Wilmington Plant. (1988). Available from Harvard Business School Publishing, Catalog No. 9-889-509.

Field Cases

Colonial Foods: Performance appraisal interview. (1986). Available from Harvard Business School Publishing, Catalog No. 9-887-512.

Dansk Designs, Ltd. Available from Harvard Business School Publishing, Catalog No. 9-883-515.

Dansk Designs, Ltd., The administration of creativity, Part 2. (1971). Available from Harvard Business School Publishing, Catalog No. 9-885-516.

A day with Renn Zaphiropoulos. (1979). Available from Harvard Business School Publishing, Catalog No. 9-881-501.

A day with Fred Henderson. (1979). Available from Harvard Business School Publishing, Catalog No. 9-881-502.

Case Series

Troubleshooter. Available from the British Broadcasting System, Woodlands, 80 Woodlane, London, W120TT (for business).

Case Videos:

Tri-Ang Toys
Copella Fruit Juice
Apricot Computers
Churchill Tableware
The Morgan Motor Company

Troubleshooter II. Available from the British Broadcasting System, Woodlands, 80 Woodlane, London, W120TT (for business).

Case Videos:

Tollemache and Cobbold Brewery
Double Two

(continued)

Appendix (Continued)

The Charles Letts Group
Norton

Hollywood Movies With Extensive Case Usage Histories

Donnelly, T., & Freedlin, W. (1957). *12 angry men* [Film]. (Available from Orion-Nova).

Zanuck, D. E., & King, H. (1949). *Twelve o'clock high* [Film]. (Available from Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation).

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