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Distribution and promotion of films by the Open Cages Poland: Between an activist agenda and digital marketing

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The aim of this paper is to analyse the distribution and promotion methods employed by Stowarzyszenie Otwarte Klatki (Open Cages Poland, OCP). Animal Charity Evaluators (ACE), a body which evaluates the effectiveness of pro-animal organisations, has recognised OCP several times as one of the most effective animal rights groups dedicated to so-called “farm” animals (Animal Charity Evaluators, <https://animalcharityevaluators.org>)¹. As part of their mission the association in question strives for social change to stop the exploitation of non-human animals by humans. OCP carries out many of its intervention, education and outreach activities through audiovisual material, which serve to convince stakeholders of its cause and encourage taking steps to defend animals. In terms of film culture, the organisation relies on managerial methods to administer creative processes, as well as promote and disseminate their films in a well-thought-out manner. Social media platforms serve as their main channel of publication.

Taking the requirements of the digital world into account while designing one’s activities is not surprising in a world dominated by the media, which now represents an integral component of human existence. To a large extent, it is in the media that public and private life takes place and, consequently, it is there that OCP must look for stakeholders. However, it may be worthwhile to consider

¹ ACE evaluates charities against four criteria: programmes, room for more funding, cost-effectiveness and the leadership and organisational culture. Cf. Animal Charity Evaluators, <https://animalcharityevaluators.org> [30.01.2023].

how the activists create the material. How is film production linked to the modes of distribution and promotion employed by OCP? Do the characteristics of particular platforms impact the filmmaking process? How do distribution and publicity factors influence the work of the activists in charge of the audiovisual content? Who is the audience of OCP's communications? The following text will attempt to answer these questions. I am also going to reflect on the implications of the organisation's activities not only on a microscale, i.e. involving OCP, animal welfare organisations and animals, but also consider the macroscale, where they may affect the entire media ecosystem.

A number of researchers criticise using social media to pursue an activist agenda². Evgeny Morozov observes that in countries with authoritarian systems, allowing opposition activists and citizens to contact one another and express themselves freely online maintains the illusion of freedom while actually working to the advantage of the system and the so-called authoritarian discussion, as it furthers the regime's designs (Morozov, 2009, 2011). Maciej Ożóg, in turn, sees participatory culture as a culture of supervision and surveillance, redefining Foucault's notion of the panopticon: "For the IT panopticon does not operate merely as a corrective apparatus, but as a tool for preventing, anticipating and eliminating danger" (Ożóg, 2018, p. 21). Globally, the rules of the game in the media environment are largely dictated by the new media corporations. The so-called Big Five of technology (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple and Microsoft, abbreviated as GAFAM) have a tremendous influence on user activity, as they track it, design it, and derive financial profits from it.

It would therefore be legitimate to ask about the extent to which individuals are able to preserve their freedom online. Are decisions made by the users or by the algorithms? How deeply are we entangled in the system, and to what degree do we nurture it by becoming its actors and even (unpaid) employees? How do OCP members deal with their entanglement in the processes within the media society, and what does this say about the association as an activist group fighting for social change?

This article recapitulates a fragment of broader research concerned with OCP film production. This text is the result of an analysis of existing data, background studies in film production and distribution, new media and media education, as well as qualitative research involving the activists. Nine individual in-depth interviews were conducted with persons at OCP who are responsible for the production, distribution and promotion of audiovisual material, the volunteers and the staff alike. The perspective arising from these interviews constituted the core of the following text and provided valuable external and internal insights into OCP. The research was carried out in an active manner, relying primarily on discursive and narrative methods (Kvale, 2010). However, before discussing the distribution and publicity practices at OCP, the paper outlines how contemporary media society is viewed in relevant scholarship.

² Their concepts are also critical of academic studies that espouse technological optimism or overlook political and economic aspects, as in the case of Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture. Cf. Fuchs (2014).

Media society

To say that we live in a media society is somewhat of a truism today. As Mark Deuze (2011, p. 138) observed, “Our life is lived in, rather than with, media – we are living a media life.” The invisible media has been omnipresent in the life of recent generations, in particular, for whom the new media is an intuitive and inseparable part of the reality into which they were born. At the same time, the representatives of these generations are aware that this change distinguishes them from their parents and grandparents. Piotr Czerski (07.03.2012) addresses that in his text-manifesto, in which he becomes a voice of the digital generations, demanding that the analogue generations change their perception of the relationship between the new media and humans:

For us, the network is not something external to reality, but its component. We do not use the network, we live in it and with it. If we were to tell you, the analogue ones, our *Bildungsroman*: there was a natural online element to each formative experience of ours [all highlights by this author].

Deuze calls for a similar position to be adopted on the grounds of science:

The newness of the contemporary human condition can perhaps best be understood in an abstract sense as a socio-technical experience of reality – a reality that seems to submit itself (potentially) to the affordances (or, as Deleuze and Guattari [1987] have suggested, “agencements”) of media: a reality that could be cut, pasted, edited, remixed and forwarded. This argument builds on my earlier suggestion that **media should not be seen as somehow located outside of lived experience, but rather should be seen as intrinsically part of it** (Deuze, 2011, p. 138).

Once accepted, such a paradigm makes it possible to perceive the issues correlated with the invisibility and ubiquity of media that affect contemporary societies – such as digital exclusion, media illiteracy or mediophobia, which lead to social exclusion and exacerbate inequalities – and find a remedy. To a large extent, this consists in developing media skills: the essential skillset of the individual which enables them to function in the individual/private as well as collective/public domains.

Contemporary media education must be aligned with the needs and problems arising from the transformations in the (new)media industry. Such an assertion seems to be confirmed by Grzegorz Ptaszek, author of the concept of media education 3.0, which responds to the shift of the media environment in the second decade of the 21st century. The author speaks of a new technological and social context. After Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 – whose principal functions included enabling users to obtain information (Web 1.0), relationship networking, engagement, and participation (Web 2.0) – the time has come for Web 3.0 (Ptaszek, 2019, p. 160). Presently, new media corporations are the dominant actors in the media environment as they take advantage of the invisibility of media and their problem-free use. GAFAM manipulates users and subordinates their activities to intelligent algorithms (Ptaszek, 2019, p. 160). Every movement

online is tracked, datafied, analysed and monetised. The media are not invisible to conceal their use by humans; rather, they are invisible to hide the fact that they are exploiting their users. This leads to negative phenomena that communication power entails, such as asymmetry of information and relationships, surveillance, data colonialism and marketing, consumer profiling, computational propaganda or, finally, digital labour based on the unpaid work of the users who add to the capital of the technological Big Five while they use the internet (Ptaszek, 2019, pp. 157–247). In this context, Christian Fuchs and Sebastian Seignani advance the notion of playbour:

This online activity is fun and work at the same time – play labour. Play labour (playbour) creates a data commodity that is sold to advertising clients as a commodity. They thereby obtain the possibility of presenting advertisements that are targeted to users' interests and online behaviour. Targeted advertising is at the heart of the capital accumulation model of many corporate social media platforms (Fuchs and Seignani, 2013, p. 237).

Although numerous practices of this kind are permitted by law, users can influence them by tailoring the terms of use and privacy policies to their needs.

Ptaszek (2019) finds that privacy management and critical thinking are two key skills in media education 3.0. They compel one to adopt a distance towards the theories according to which digital media work in the service of freedom, truthfulness and democracy. They enable one to see the invisible mechanisms of the communication power held by new media corporations. The awareness of the rules dictated by the key stakeholders of Web 3.0, the technology corporations and the governments exploiting the invisibility of the media for their own ends may offer protection (effective to at least some extent) against their influence. The only question that remains is: do the activists responsible for film production at OCP possess such skills and utilise them? To what extent are the members of the association aware of their role in the media environment and the impact they have on it? Finally, does OCP effectively use digital media to advance an activist agenda, or does it contribute to a technological dystopia by doing unpaid work for the technological ecosystem?

OCP's distribution channels

Open Cages Poland uses a variety of film distribution channels, though social media are their primary vehicle. The marketing strategy is informed by its limited resources, both financial and human. Magdalena Łapińska, OCP's digital marketing manager, emphasises: "If we have an opportunity and there is a budget for offline media, then we create some material. However, because of the budget, this is much rarer than online activities" (Łapińska, 21.04.2020)³.

³ These annotations indicate interviews conducted with OCP staff and volunteers, stating the name of the respondent and the date of the interview.

On the other hand, distribution in the traditional fields of film exploitation (cinema, television, DVD/Blu-ray discs, VOD) seldom ensures reaching the broadest audience possible – which, according to many, is the main goal of OCP (Dobrowolska, 29.04.2020) – or proves impossible due to the nature of the organisation’s audiovisual material. Usually, that material consists of short films which demonstrate varying (not necessarily high) degrees of artistic merit as well as sound and image quality. Still, there are also rhetorically and visually advanced productions whose screenings take place at events, conferences and festivals dedicated to animal issues, veganism, or environmental conservation. Even so, such distribution channels are not a priority, as their audiences consist of people who largely share the values promoted by OCP. Photojournalist Konrad Łoziński states:

I’m not in favour – and I don’t think I’m alone in this view – of confining such things to the ghetto of veganism and animal rights, but I believe in trying to get it all out there. We don’t want to convince the convinced, and there’s some risk of doing exactly that. It’s about reaching people who are not exposed to it. [...] If someone came up with the idea of making a block of films on such and such a subject, that would already defuse the subversive potential of that material. [...] It’s much better to go for more neutral areas, meaning festivals that don’t have a preconceived theme or television broadcasters that show very diverse material (Łoziński, 20.12.2019).

Nadina Dobrowolska, a film project coordinator, says that there is room at OCP for both shorter films suitable for social media and longer, more ambitious productions that could be distributed online and at documentary film festivals.⁴ At the same time, she makes no secret of the priority given to the material created with social media in mind:

I would very much like to continue with this kind of storytelling marketing, that is, releasing the stories of people who, for example, live a plant-based diet totally against stereotypes [...] or general stories relating to veganism, a plant-based lifestyle relying on positive communication. There’s room for mini-documentaries which will be more artistic and sophisticated. [...] **But I also think we have a clear-cut boundary in our minds. I don’t see it in terms of ambition that making short forms is uncool or demoralising. It’s simply a response to how much the industry changed when small cameras arrived, among other things** (Dobrowolska, 29.04.2020).

The transformation of the film and media industry, OCP’s limited resources and the organisation’s overarching mission of changing the fate of livestock for the better through social impact make it imperative to analyse the gains and losses of taking particular actions as far as film distribution is concerned.

There is another important aspect that the activists take into account when choosing their distribution channels, namely the speed of release. In the fields of exploitation, such as cinema, film festivals and the like, one has to develop

⁴This was the case with the documentary entitled *The Hidden Farms Of Europe* (dir. Connor Jackson, 2017), which was screened at festivals and cinemas, and even won a number of awards.

a promotional strategy and work out the logistical issues, which translates into a significant time delay between the original conception, the shooting, and the eventual screening. Social and traditional media (mainly television and the press) make it possible to reach a wide audience as well as publish the material as soon as post-production has been completed. This is vital in the case of OCP, as some topics may become outdated, which particularly applies to footage from interventions/investigations. Łoziński says:

It's necessary for the material to be released as quickly as possible, and sometimes, if we do not publish it immediately, we may allow a situation to happen in which something is covered up, some things are not done, some procedures are not completed, because the staff of an institution – the police, the prosecutor's office or the District Veterinary Inspectorate – will not feel media interest breathing down their necks. The media is always an additional bogeyman. **In fact, the media is key. If there is no media interest, they can totally ignore us** (Łoziński, 20.12.2019).

It may therefore be deduced that, to some extent, the traditional media are the most effective distribution channel for OCP films. However, it is important to note that their role becomes crucial with hot topics that one seldom comes across; communications specialist Marta Korzeniak says:

What happens more often are commentaries; when a TV editorial team is doing their story, and they need a comment from someone from the organisation, then they use our material in theirs, for example. However, coverage that devotes a few minutes just to us is relatively rare – once every few months, I think (Korzeniak, 18.07.2020).

Most OCP material (also other than footage) is published in the press and on websites. Activities involving traditional media are based on expanding the selection of media, their monitoring and individual collaboration with journalists. The association does not prioritise animal-oriented outlets, but those,

which focus on economic or agricultural issues; the news media of the more general kind, the economic media or those dedicated to marketing [...] we rather try to match the topic to a given medium, but the assortment of outlets is huge (Korzeniak, 18.07.2020).

Interaction with the media involves sending press releases, newsletters, etc. Such communications contain text, graphics and videos. The audiovisual content submitted to the media has usually been prepared for the organisation's social media with the aim of publicising a theme. In the case of news stories, Korzeniak attaches raw footage that the media may use. OCP does not make videos intended for a specific production with a given outlet:

Even if we send ready-made material, but the topic is not interesting enough, they will not release it. And if they find it interesting, they will also produce the material themselves, which is ultimately better for us, because we are able to do something else in the meantime. Also, it seems to me that better quality material is needed if it's to air on TV [...] they know better what they need than we do (Korzeniak, 18.07.2020).

Contact with TV broadcasters is not initiated often, and Korzeniak herself corroborates the statements of other activists about the crucial role of social media in the dissemination of films, as they often prompt coverage in the mainstream media:

When we send them something, we want it to be good so that they won't get fed up with us [...]. I try to leave such opportunities open for bigger things, but there are times when the television gets in touch first. This was the case with Maciek the Fox, when we were contacted by the editors of *Pytanie na Śniadanie*, or when TVN's *Dzień dobry* did the same when we published a film with Ms Irenka [a story of a ninety-three-year-old vegetarian entitled *Meatless for 30 Years – Meet Ms Irenka*, produced for OCP by Papaya Films – author's note]. **So publication on social media also results in media collaboration** (Korzeniak, 18.07.2020).

As the main field of exploitation, social media reconcile all the needs of OCP's mission and the constraints involved in film production since they enable:

- regular, multiple and immediate sharing of content;
- publication of short stories that do not have to meet high artistic standards and do not require advanced technology in production;
- reaching a broad audience and selecting a target audience at no cost (or at a minor cost with sponsored posts);
- using the potential of the volunteers who have at least basic filmmaking skills;
- saving time, which would otherwise have to be spent on, e.g. an elaborate promotional strategy, logistics and interaction with other entities in the case of other distribution channels;
- full control over published content and feedback;
- developing a coherent and optimised marketing strategy.

This strategy determines the type and purpose of the films produced by OCP activists. They pursue several objectives based on the so-called marketing funnel. Łapińska explains:

The first goal of our films is strictly range-oriented, to reach the widest possible group of people for whom this may be the first- or second-ever exposure to the subject of farm animals and our organisation. [...] This is where very simple and typically reach-oriented films work well, based not so much on controversy, but clickbait and often also positive videos with rescued animals. **Another purpose of our films, the slightly more difficult ones, is to clarify more complex issues**, to explain, for example, what frankenchickens are, what the difference between class three and other eggs is, meaning the educational dimension. **And the third goal includes films that have a dedicated purpose, fundraising, for example, allocating the 1% [income tax donation], signing a petition, and making a donation.** These are the kind of films that, for example, tell a story, and at the end, there is a clear call to action with a specific purpose. So I would divide the goals **into typical image-and-reach, educational and those serving to achieve campaign objectives** (Łapińska, 21.04.2020).

In order to effectively accomplish the above goals, the activists need to create videos in line with the criteria deriving from the characteristics of the social media and the target group. One must, therefore, intend to consider what formal elements and tools such media require OCP filmmakers to use and how the solutions applied in the films relate to media education, digital labour, and freedom of decision-making in the media ecosystem.

Strategic management and performance benchmarks

OCP's social media activities are anything but amateurish and haphazard. Although the organisation is continually developing, introducing new solutions on its pages/profiles and setting up new profiles on further platforms⁵, OCP's social media operations may be said to be highly professionalised. This is evinced in a concrete digital marketing strategy, which is formulated and updated following research and analyses; the latter yields information on the audience of the association's content and shows which solutions hit the mark on a given platform. They are interested in the activities of the users (viewing, responding to posts, sharing posts), which translate into other actions that may result in a systemic change; for instance, OCP examines how many signatures under a specific petition were prompted by the campaign video.

As Łapińska emphasises, OCP's stakeholder groups in social media are well-identified. They typically include women aged 20–35 from large cities, whereby the particulars differ slightly for each platform.

On Facebook, we have people who are not so involved in the actions for animals movement. There are groups of people who are trying to help animals, but at the same time don't need to know much about it [...] the YouTube audience is more fragmented, i.e. on the one hand, there are people who are actually already interested enough in the organisation that they will watch several- or over 10-minute long material to learn more, and, on the other, there are completely random people, which can unfortunately also be seen in the quality of the comments. [...] On Facebook, we have slightly older people, and on Instagram, we have younger people and on Facebook, there's a broad group of people who are not necessarily even vegetarian or vegan. For example, we have a lot of people who are against fur farming but do eat meat. The audience on Instagram is more vegan (Łapińska, 21.04.2020).

The dietary aspect is not the focus of OCP's research. Whether someone declares themselves to be a meat eater, vegetarian or vegan follows from their reactions (comments, likes, shares). Their numbers are sufficiently representative to draw conclusions and make decisions about the programmatic line for social

⁵ The organisation runs broad-ranging activities on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, but the latter two platforms are the most important from OCP's point of view. The association has its TikTok and Twitch profiles as well; these are currently being developed. Cf. Interview with Magdalena Lapinska, 21.04.2020.

media. The association tries not to pressure the stakeholders but rather proceed in the spirit of the campaigns, which are divided into welfare and lifestyle campaigns.

Diet is addressed in the *PlantsWeEat* campaign or through *Vegan Challenge*. And we [OCP's general social media profile – author's note] try to talk about animal welfare, petitions, and pressure on companies. The aim here is that it's done more effectively. For example, in order to persuade a company to introduce plant-based options, it's no good flooding them with animal-related content. On the other hand, if we want to convince someone, for example, to support our campaign on fur prices, that person doesn't necessarily have to be vegan, and then we don't want to scare them off either, which is why we have this division (Łapińska, 21.04.2020).

The activists also employ A/B tests to verify the reception of OCP's audiovisual output, comparing two versions of a film and assessing which performs better. The importance of the procedure is quite considerable, notably with material concerning controversial subjects or containing graphic footage, as viewers often respond in an aggressive and negative manner in the comments. Additionally, they do not necessarily work well with more sensitive persons, who are likely to discontinue viewing. Dobrowolska stresses that this bears on effectiveness: "If they don't watch the full video, then somewhere our goal is not achieved either" (Dobrowolska, 29.04.2020).

When making videos, OCP activists also consider the specificity of the platforms, which informs, e.g. the choice of the type and length of the material as well as the formal means. Social media necessitate using or avoiding specific narratives and dramaturgical and visual devices due to potential penalties: from diminished reach, through deletion of a post, to having one's account blocked. This awareness, combined with the knowledge derived from the analysis of audiovisual material and OCP audience research, enables the activists to introduce such solutions in their videos which, in their opinion, tally with the goals to be accomplished. As the interviewees point out, it is only recently that more attention has been paid to the need to create dedicated material for each platform. Łapińska says:

On Facebook, for the most part, our content is short, short videos in a square with a clear call to action, even without voiceover but with subtitles, because what does well on Facebook is straightforward videos, which are not consumed quite like films [...]. **Sometimes we post longer stuff, but as for more complex films with much talking, we tend to upload them to Youtube.** We have a completely different format of videos there. With YouTube, we try to cut back on the short, simple forms and post longer material, for example, telling a story or, increasingly, Youtube-kind episodes, where someone says something to us to the camera and explains certain things. **We don't make videos specifically for Instagram because we see that graphics work better there. If there's something important, we upload the same thing we posted on Facebook, only that it goes to Stories or Instagram TV [...]. We do very simple things on Twitter**, well, unless a new campaign

is launched. For example, if there is something big and important, then yes, but there it's rather **text plus graphics** (Łapińska, 21.04.2020).

The most extensive changes have taken place on YouTube. Previously, the platform served as a kind of archive for the organisation, including publicity videos and footage from the farms, among other things. Now, an increasing volume of disseminated content is created with this platform in mind as it draws new audiences more effectively. Dobrowolska assesses:

I think the problem [with YouTube – author's note] was that for a long time, the channel had no coherent vision at all, [...] thinking in terms of series was also lacking. At some point, there came the realisation that YouTube was a bit of a folder called "All the videos we've managed to make in full", and there was no such thinking that we should do typical YouTube content, but things that were made for Facebook or something like that were uploaded there. And now we want there to be some talking videos: *Post-Cage News* or the *How to Help Animals* series, interviews with experts. Then I'd like – that would be a dream come true – to have explainers [animated educational videos inspired by the projects of the German studio Kurzgesagt – author's note], a series of mini-documentaries along the lines of *Ms Irenka* and wholesome stories. This is the long-term plan for YouTube (Dobrowolska, 29.04.2020).

Adapting the videos to specific platforms influences the approach to the topic, depending on the various target social media. Volunteer Michal Hawełka explains using his own example:

Right now, I'm working on videos from *Tattoos Instead of Fur* [an event as part of the eponymous campaign – author's note]. We shot a lot of tattooists and their statements, and now I'm doing the videos for Instagram: minute-long ones in which the person says a few lines, and one can see their tattoos and the people themselves at work. From this, we want to make a separate video for fb, which will be a bit longer and show the whole studio, [...] and then we want to make an even longer video for YouTube, showing the whole initiative (Hawełka, 8.12.2019).

Such an individualised approach to social media demonstrates OCP's high degree of professionalisation and knowledge of the media market. This, in turn, makes it possible to apply the formal and marketing devices in the videos to achieve the intended effect, i.e. improve the fate of farm animals by involving internet users in the organisation's activities.

From the standpoint of OCP activists, the most important thing is that their films elicit emotions. This is independent of the subject matter, as productions about rescued animals in a shelter and those documenting the situation on farms work well. With respect to Facebook, Łapińska says: "We try not to exceed a certain level of brutality in the film because Facebook blocks it. What works well is not violent, but sad stuff that tells a story" (Łapińska, 21.04.2020). Nevertheless, as Hawełka admits, the activists want OCP's social media image to be seen as positive:

Now we have this approach that our social media should convey a more wholesome message. We don't want to post footage from farms one after another. Such material is posted, obviously, but it's not the social media keynote because research has shown that a positive message reaches people better. People always prefer to see a rescued pig rather than the conditions it was in before. **Although these farm videos also get good shares and clicks, their watch time is not that good** (Hawełka, 08.12.2019).

Regardless of the subject matter of the films, the creators use visual and narrative devices which do well in the most recent reception of audiovisual texts, i.e. mediated by small, portable screens: laptops, tablets, and phones. Such a viewing modality involves a small screen size and low resolution, poor sound (or even no sound at all) and an environment that differs from the cinema. It is thus more difficult to concentrate and immerse oneself; the reception is often selective. OCP activists agree that these characteristics necessitate short, uncomplicated films that should capture the viewer's attention from the first seconds. Łapińska says:

It is characteristic of our material that it has to evoke emotions. This is what their entire effectiveness relies on. Naturally, sometimes there's material geared more towards being informative, but most of our content, if it does not grab attention in that first moment, there's usually little chance that it will work well (Łapińska, 21.04.2020).

When asked what should feature at the beginning of a video, Dobrowolska replies: "Something catchy. It also depends if we're doing positive communication or if it's a welfare campaign to expose cruelty to animals, but [...] it's good to have some kind of cute muzzle at the start" (Dobrowolska, 29.04.2020).

In a sense, the "cute muzzle" referred to by Dobrowolska becomes a recurring motif in OCP films. With a running time of several minutes or under a minute – down to a few seconds – these are productions in which the message must be easy to understand due to the limited duration and relative complexity of the issue. The association is most active on Facebook, where reach is often built thanks to single-shot material which draws viewers' attention to a particular animal. Volunteer Aleksandra Dymek states: "Several seconds of a running fox makes more of an impression than longer forms" (Dymek, 08.12.2019). In order to facilitate the viewer's cognitive and perceptual immersion, the films undergo virtually no post-production (with the exception of simple editing and, possibly, adding background music). Łapińska emphasises:

Completely raw videos, for example, videos from sanctuaries for rescued animals, work very well on Facebook. **I believe such raw footage feels quite genuine for people, and it lasts a while.** For example, we show pigs playing around and don't even have to process it in any way, it works well (Łapińska, 21.04.2020).

It is important for OCP films to have a main character alongside the collective protagonist. This consists in choosing a single animal and making it into a symbol (Łoziński, 20.12.2019). Telling its story in an individualised

fashion or even ostensibly from its perspective proves successful on OCP social media (Łapińska, 21.04.2020). Consequently, the viewers for whom the issues of veganism and the fight for animal rights are alien or abstract may still comprehend it through references to familiar cultural codes. Such productions can even score millions of views. The stories of people on a plant-based diet and people protesting against the construction of farms in or near their localities also attract the attention of viewers. Next to footage from investigations, which often lacks narrative structure but arouses viewers' interest due to their controversial nature, OCP videos which explore the stories of specific animals stories perform best on YouTube: "Our channel's most popular material is the story of the rescued chicken Tosia or Franken chicken, i.e. the story of one chicken" (Łapińska, 21.04.2020).

The information shared by OCP activists suggests that the technical and artistic facet is secondary. Dobrowolska says:

The message is the most important thing, much more so than making it beautiful or spruced up. Obviously, we want the videos to have that nice and professional look, but experience shows that shooting something with a super camera or amazing lighting does not necessarily translate into views or the message reaching more people. If you look at Open Cages' Facebook videos in terms of views, sometimes there're such spectacular pieces that were really badly made, as if shot with a mobile phone, and suddenly it turns out that the video that has half a million views, just because it was such a sweet story, for example (Dobrowolska, 29.04.2020).

The absence of a uniform artistic vision or authorial style for all the films is also irrelevant:

The films of Open Cages are very different, and you can see that there is no visual oversight [...], but at the end of the day, it turns out that it's not much of an issue. I think a lot of social media experts are so rigid that if you want to have your super-Instagram or super-Facebook, everything has to follow one style and you have to buy specific presets for the photos and videos and use them as long as you live because otherwise your wall will look disgusting and nobody will like it. [...] That doesn't apply in our case. **We're not some kind of sophisticated brand or product, we don't sell anything – except maybe ideas – so I think this is where it becomes irrelevant in some interesting way** (Dobrowolska, 29.04.2020).

Suitable narration, straightforward yet emotionally compelling gimmicks that add a touch of the extraordinary and the use of such solutions that have worked well on specific platforms enable the organisation to operate more effectively on social media and, as a result, help animals more successfully in non-virtual reality. Łapińska emphasises:

And, in all our activities, just as in films, **we do give it a lot of thought if the outlay of time involved in a particular thing is justified, so we try to make an effort to actually achieve the intended effects** like collecting signatures for a petition or reaching a new group of people (Łapińska, 21.04.2020).

This approach to film production stems from OCP's philosophy of effective altruism. Specifically, one has to opt for the most effective actions for the betterment of the world (which, in this case, means helping so-called farm animals) using the available resources. While it sounds natural for an activist organisation with limited means to choose such a strategy, it forces the filmmakers to resort to devices designed by technology corporations and affects the staff within the organisation, including the volunteers, of whom there are few in the film team. Apart from the allocation of duties and working time, the creative dimension is at stake as well. Although the creators can suggest changes in the approach to film production, there is little room for manoeuvre given the scarce human and financial resources as well as the priorities, one of which is using proven formal elements in films in order to win audiences over to the values promoted by OCP. Such an approach affects the internal functioning of the organisation, which then translates into its external impact, meaning the association's position as an actor in the technological ecosystem.

OCP's marketing approach to films influences communication within the team and the structure of film production, which subsequently reflects in the media skills which the volunteers are expected to develop. They are trained in what works well on social media. Although pertinent guides and articles are quite numerous, the internal knowledge base is expanded to streamline the production process. Hawelka explains:

We want to use some kind of online tool for video editing to make the process even simpler so that more and more people can do it, leaving only the more difficult forms for us to edit (Hawelka, 08.12.2019).

Ultimately, the digital marketing and film project coordinators intend to create as many templates, typefaces and animations as possible to provide volunteers with resources they can apply automatically to the raw footage. This strategy is indicative of the fact that post-production – which is the main job of the film team – is to be fast and efficient. By learning ready-made action patterns instead of the essentials of film art, even novice filmmakers soon acquire or develop the skills needed to devise persuasive messages. Volunteer Anna Marchewka underlines that she learnt post-production by watching videos by OCP and other pro-animal organisations on YouTube, as well as listening to the tips and suggestions for changes from the coordinators.

Have you watched any tutorials on film aesthetics, other than concerning equipment or software, but on things like how to combine shots and what editing procedures to use?

No, not at all.

[...]

Did you have many revisions in your first films?

Yes, I remember when I was working on my first film for Facebook, I sent it to Magda, and there were quite a lot of revisions, starting, for example, from “maybe change the font” to “maybe add a shot like this here, because it's quite empty”, but now such corrections are much fewer. [...]

How are these changes justified? Is it a matter of your taste or a question of what others will like later on?

I think both, because it's clear that everyone has their own taste and aesthetic, and everyone would have the video look a bit different. The question of one's opinion is always a fraction of that decision. But things are often done on the basis of "maybe this way's better because it will be easier for the viewer" or, for example, people on Facebook pay more attention when, for example, the font is red rather than white (Marchewka, 15.12.2019).

Marchewka's statement is also indicative of the organisation's approach to volunteers. Audiovisual content creators (especially beginners) have little influence on the final shape of the films. They become OCP employees who fulfil their duties according to the instructions from their superiors. In turn, the instructions of the latter depend on the internal and external factors that may benefit the organisation. Marchewka confirms that in the case of campaign films, "we are given a ready-made script and material to edit" (Marchewka, 15.12.2019). Łoziński, on the other hand, speaks even more emphatically about the decision-making mandate of the association's members:

Those who do the editing are almost exclusively people who normally do not work on campaigns. Most often, all they need is just such ironclad scripts, what narrative should be there, even when it comes to the verbal narrative itself, it would be good if it was included there. There are such precise guidelines so that the video makes sense (Łoziński, 20.12.2019).

Łoziński also draws attention to the filming process during an intervention. Footage and photographic documentation are by no means the most difficult part of it. It seems that increasingly better interviewing skills or familiarity with legal issues become more important than developing filmmaking skills (Łoziński, 20.12.2019). Although media skills are indeed trained among OCP volunteers – though only those relating to film – the instruction does not involve learning film theory but focuses on the formal elements that have proved effective in social media. Consequently, the material concerned with the same theme ultimately shows little diversity (Łoziński, 24.05.2020).

As for thinking about filmmaking, you can't forget about editing, that you'll have to make a complete thing out of it later [...]. And that, for example, was my issue on many occasions as I reviewed the material from previous years [...] that there were a lot of very good shots, but also lots of those which were very monotonous and captured in the same way, with the camera next to the cage.

At the same time, it is the current approach to film production that Łoziński calls professional:

It's going in the right direction, I feel. There's a full-timer now at Cages who does the editing and used to do it professionally before being hired, so it's been made very clear that we need someone to do the editing on a professional level [...]. There're also volunteers who work in editing daily, and [...] they edit films for us in their spare time (Łoziński, 24.05.2020).

The manner in which OCP activists create audiovisual content can indeed be described as professional, though chiefly in terms of digital marketing as opposed to professional film production; this is well evinced in Dobrowolska's statement:

The film team is composed of people who have some experience in filmmaking as well as those who have no such experience at all because, actually, when creating that social media content, it is not necessary to have experience in this matter (Dobrowolska, 29.04.2020).

It may therefore be concluded that the degree of proficiency and deliberate use of the technical audiovisual skillset – now widespread among young people – is a secondary concern for the organisation. Not only does OCP choose to disregard the skills that are crucial for media education 3.0, but it also develops film skills in an unreflective manner through ready-made patterns of action. Thus, it does engage in media education, but in doing so, it employs practices typical of media education 2.0, which emerged in the early 21st century and no longer responds to the issues of the media society and contemporary threats. One of the ramifications of this is that OCP, in a sense, consents for the new media corporations to exercise power over internet users and, given the pro-animal, activist nature of the organisation – whose members contest the anthropocentric worldview and system – contributes to enhancing that power; since it simultaneously facilitates monetisation of their efforts, it becomes entangled in unpaid digital labour. For the association, this is a necessary (in view of its overarching mission) but costly trade-off.

Operating within such a technological-cultural paradigm makes the activists rely on its proper social practices, tools and communication protocols. In terms of organisational framework, OCP is not unlike a corporation since it retains a hierarchy (the teams have their coordinators who hold meetings and then pass the information on to the volunteers/employees), relies on technology in work and communication (including applications such as Trello and Slack; production of content using hardware, software and online functionalities; distribution and promotion of content online) and follows a model analogous to line/mass production. Łoziński even uses corresponding nomenclature:

There's the film team, a group of editors who do editing exclusively. Sometimes they are the same people who write scripts, sometimes there're people who do scripts only but no longer edit, so that makes a **small factory**. It's all divided up. Someone does the camerawork, someone writes the script, someone else does the editing, and someone else still uploads the finished film to social media and provides it with additional commentary (Łoziński, 24.05.2020).

Finally, the entanglement in the technological and cultural paradigm has artistic implications, meaning moderate scope for creative expression as well as personal and professional development. This is the case for several reasons. The association runs a limited number of campaigns, and campaign-related films are prioritised over the individual plans and ideas of the creators. Hence,

Łoziński collaborates with other pro-animal organisations, even though he is formally employed at OCP (Łoziński, 24.05.2020). However, such collaboration carries the risk of losing control over one's own work. The institutions which use Łoziński's photographs receive a product which has already been processed but may nonetheless interfere with it for the purposes of their activities. Cropping is the most common change, but a photojournalist also sees several examples of colour correction.

Didn't it bother you?

No, as to how and who will use that material – I absolutely give them free rein in that respect. All the same, I'd suggest that the information about the author is used in these publications [...]; this is simply an added value when the material is publicised. [...], perhaps that material will find its way to where some completely anonymous documentation would not, even though it was good but simply anonymous, with no one knowing who's behind it (Łoziński, 24.05.2020).

It is evident from the above that, for Łoziński, the purpose which his work will serve and its potential benefits to the animals nullify the risk to the photojournalist's authorial touch, when their photographs undergo additional processing or are disseminated using particular distribution channels.

The distribution and promotion of films on social media also compels OCP filmmakers to practice (self-)censorship, especially with respect to the graphic images which show the physical suffering of animals and human violence against animals. Referring to a carp farm material that she edited, Marchewka observes:

I remember that when making the first version of this video, I mixed the shots a bit: there were some showing the ponds, and I added some stronger shots, but Marysia [the campaign coordinator – author's note] suggested to me that maybe it'd be better to switch it to something else because not everyone likes it because some people might be put off by such shots because they're too explicit.

And you changed them to something "lighter"?

Yes, I actually swapped them for other ones (Marchewka, 15.12.2019).

Łapińska emphasises that (self-)censorship is sometimes necessary, not only because of the risk of having their material blocked but also for the sake of the audience, whom OCP does not want to repulse with overly graphic imagery.

It is not our goal to have someone turn it off because they're unable to watch it. There have been situations where the film was not so much blocked, but censorship kicked in, and then that lowers the reach and circulation of the film, so we try to avoid that. [...]

Does it often happen that films are not suitable for publication?

There are such situations. Usually, if there are any graphic videos, someone who gives feedback knows that it should look more or less like this or that, and if it's too graphic, we change it a bit. On the other hand, there have also been situations with beginners where the films simply weren't good enough visually, and then we send them to be corrected, and sometimes the production takes a bit longer because of that, but obviously, once someone does the revisions, the next time they'll know how to do it and it goes more smoothly (Łapińska, 21.04.2020).

The aesthetic implications may also include a limited selection of material for post-production. Although the volunteers often have a favourite theme they would like to edit, the persons on the film team are too few to meet the demand for completed films. Therefore, the activists have to follow the suggestions from campaign coordinators. Marchewka says: “Nobody gets to choose on the grounds that they prefer one subject over another, you just take what you have, but nobody forces you to do anything either” (Marchewka, 15.12.2019). Hawełka, on the other hand, stresses that although he prefers to edit the films he shoots himself and then does the post-production according to his own ideas, he is aware of his position as a creator:

If I’m given a ready-made script and, for example, a ready-made recording of a person speaking, then there’s not so much leeway anymore because I’ve to work with what I’ve been given. I definitely prefer it when I have the opportunity to be in control of the whole process from start to finish, but that rather seldom happens. [...] I always prefer to do something with the film, but it’s also a bit like it’s not supposed to be me playing around with the editing, but that people are supposed to watch it, so sometimes you have to put your ideals aside (Hawełka, 08.12.2019).

Łapińska, on the other hand, admits explicitly that OCP is not a place for artistic projects:

If you are difficult to work with, if you are strongly artistically inclined – and after all, Open Cages is not a place for artistic visions, but the films have to accomplish a specific purpose – then such people drop out rather quickly because it turns out that the organisation is not a place for them (Łapińska, 21.04.2020).

The above statements demonstrate that OCP’s functioning within a technological ecosystem determines the creative freedom of the film team members since the effective pursuit of the activist mission using audiovisual material prevails over the possibility of realising an artistic and authorial vision in films. Consequently, this informs the approach to the hardware and software required in film production.

Volunteers’ access to technology varies, as activists use mainly their own equipment and, until recently – i.e. when a free online editing tool was opted for – obtain the required software themselves. Such a state of affairs considerably hampers the development of the audiovisual skillset and prevents volunteers from undertaking certain production-related activities. This is not to say that OCP does not allocate any resources to making film production more professional and increasing the expertise of those involved. Dobrowolska has introduced a free online video editor and is planning to purchase further equipment. However, it should be noted that those actions are not motivated by the need to create space for self-development and skill improvement among the volunteers (which takes place in passing, as it were), but – in line with the calculation deriving from the concept of effective altruism – by the desire to act more effectively in defence of animals through intensified and higher quality film production (Dobrowolska, 29.04.2020). The expenditure towards professionalised film

production must be profitable, i.e. be adequately low in relation to the profits gained (such as the number of collected petition signatures, donations received or film views). When this is not the case, the needs of the activists are either ignored or meeting them is adjourned. It may be noted at this point that the volunteers either understand or even share such a hierarchy of values. For this reason, OCP creators accept their own “invisibility” as well. They care little about reaping accolades for the authorship of a given material; helping animals is a sufficient reward. This is evidenced, for example, by Marchewska’s statement concerning the absence of end credits in the films.

We do it selflessly, and I don’t expect to be credited anywhere. I don’t need that. It’s cool that something is edited and something of mine is there. That’s what I’m happy about. That I’ve somehow contributed to the improvement of this YouTube channel, that something is posted there, rather than having my name there (Marchewska, 15.12.2019).

Additionally, the volunteers are able to handle the psychological implications, which amounts to a major personal cost involved in producing videos. The activists underline that their work is often difficult as they have to deal with the images of animal suffering and violence against which their efforts are directed. As regards the footage from farms, Dymek observes:

It’s hard, but my impression is that I’ve become a bit immune after so many years. If I were to relive and analyse every shot, I’d go a bit mental, **but I still feel like I have PTSD** from all those videos. It’s hard, and then I have to decompress, I don’t know, by watching silly cat videos or resetting my head a bit, because it’s hard afterwards, and you get nightmares (Dymek, 08.12.2019).

Dobrowolska adds:

There was one day that I sat for six hours in the [film] archive [...]. **There’s stress and sadness which sets in. I wouldn’t go as far as calling it an occupational risk, but there’s a certain element inherent to it that, unfortunately, we have to look at these images, which obviously it’d be better if they didn’t exist** (Dobrowolska, 29.04.2020).

Despite the difficulties and repercussions associated with film production, volunteers agree that working on audiovisual content gives them considerable satisfaction and a sense of fulfilment, and most filmmakers have no intention of changing what they do. This may also be attributed to the fact that virtually all members start working with the organisation guided by ideals as opposed to developing filmmaking skills, for instance. Their original motivation dovetails with the OCP’s mission. Marchewska explains her reasons for joining OCP:

It was rather because I identify with their ideology. I’ve always followed Open Cages, and in my opinion, they work very effectively; you can actually see the changes. [...] It’s great when we’ve achieved something, and we’re all happy that, for example, a farm has been closed thanks to us or some changes have been introduced, **but you also have to be aware that it’s not as if you were the direct cause and that it’s nothing but success all the time.** Sometimes,

the job's about sitting at a desk and entering a petition into the computer for two hours on end, and you wonder if it even makes sense (Marchewka, 15.12.2019).

Hawełka even emphasises that in her case, becoming a volunteer was immediately motivated by the desire to make films which advocated the values:

Before I joined Open Cages, I was involved in making game-related films. [...] **I found that since I'm already editing these films and I like doing it, it'd be nice if I did it for a cause** (Hawełka, 08.12.2019).

On the other hand, gaining new experience or acquiring skills becomes an additional, albeit unplanned, benefit for OCP members.

When I went to volunteer at Open Cages, I had the feeling that I was going there completely disinterestedly, and when I talked to various people later, [...] **we all agreed that, in fact, volunteering is never disinterested, because apart from you giving something, you can get heaps out of such volunteering in terms of experience, skills, as well as friends, contacts** (Marchewka, 15.12.2019).

In a sense, what the volunteers have shared answers the question concerning the freedom of network users. The activists appear personally aware of the limitations of social media creation and embrace it for the sake of a collective goal. It is that goal which gives them a sense of effective agency and self-actualisation. The above statements also attest to the significance of emotional capital for the smooth operation of OCP's organisational structure. Making films provides its members with a means to express their social identity. The conviction that they are involved in fulfilling the association's mission plays a key role, while the outcomes of the efforts in which filmmakers participate compensate for the price that activists paradoxically pay because of their unpaid digital work. This cost consists in functioning within a technological and cultural paradigm based, among other things, on the communication power of new media corporations and the ubiquity of invisible media: elements which make it possible for OCP to pursue its mission effectively.

Conclusions

In order to speak successfully on behalf of animals, Open Cages Poland very consciously creates, promotes and distributes films. Social media is their main channel of publication, as its invisibility and its characteristic logic of omnipresence actually cater to the needs of the organisation. They also enable the content to be recirculated by communicating one message in different forms. OCP has adopted a dual mode of operation, taking advantage of a well-conceived marketing strategy and the experience of its staff and volunteers in conjunction with the traditional media and a presence in the digital world.

The activists create content in a specifically oriented manner, considering the criteria dictated by the characteristics of the platforms and the target

group. For this reason, OCP trains the volunteers responsible for filmmaking in line with the requirements that their work must meet in order to reach the largest possible audience on social media rather than introducing them to the theory of film art in the strict sense. This ensures that the members of the association know what the message is and where, when and to whom they should address it. The various channels of film distribution and promotion are exploited complementarily by OCP, depending on the needs and priorities of the organisation. However, their indispensable common denominator is the capacity to yield tangible gains that are commensurate with the costs incurred (time, labour, money). Łapińska says:

With each thing, we always ask ourselves how much of a priority it is and what the animals will actually gain from it. For us, I think it'll always be a higher priority to reach a broader group of people with a simpler video than to reach a narrow circle of people who are knowledgeable in the matter with even a great, artistic film. [...] On the other hand, it's not as if we're going to trim everything that's not super-effective either because it's clearly also important for the people in the organisation to self-actualise somehow and be able to do projects that give them satisfaction. However, **our main goal is to help animals, not to build a film career – that to a much lesser extent** (Łapińska, 21.04.2020).

In her statement, Łapińska actually explains what effective altruism means for the association. OCP's mission statement reads: "to prevent animal suffering by bringing about systemic social change, documenting the conditions of industrial farming and education which promote positive attitudes towards animals" (About Us, <https://www.otwarteklatki.pl/o-nas>). The goal of the organisation is to pursue that mission as effectively as possible using all available tools, including those which – from a theoretical and ontological standpoint – are at odds with OCP's non-systemic, activist character. After all, despite their negative impact on other spheres of human life or even the environment, they ultimately become the most effective means of improving the situation of animals around the world.

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Summary

This article aims to analyse the distribution and promotion practices of films produced by the Open Cages Poland (SOK), an organisation that works for the rights of farm animals. SOK promotes and distributes audiovisual works in a deliberate way, mainly through social media, with the primary goal of implementing the organisation's objectives. The article discusses how SOK activists create films with the specificity of social media in mind and educate volunteers on specific platform criteria rather than film art theory. This approach conflicts with the non-systemic, activist nature of the organisation, but it aligns with the philosophy of effective altruism and the overriding mission of the organisation. The article is based on an analysis of existing data, film production and distribution, media education and nine individual interviews conducted with activists.

Dystrybucja i promocja filmów Stowarzyszenia Otwarte Klatki: między aktywistyczną agendą a marketingiem cyfrowym

Streszczenie

Artykuł ma na celu analizę praktyk dystrybucji i promocji filmów Stowarzyszenia Otwarte Klatki (SOK), które działa na rzecz praw zwierząt tzw. hodowlanych. Organizacja promuje i dystrybuje utwory audiowizualne w sposób świadomy, głównie w mediach społecznościowych. Nadrzędnym zadaniem produkcji audiowizualnej jest realizacja celów SOK. Aktywiści tworzą więc filmy, uwzględniając specyfikę mediów społecznościowych, oraz kształcą twórców (wolontariuszy) pod kątem kryteriów obowiązujących na konkretnych platformach, a nie teorii sztuki filmowej jako takiej. Tym samym stają się aktywnymi aktorami technologicznego ekosystemu, wyzyskującego użytkowników sieci. W pewnej mierze kłóci się to z pozasystemowym, aktywistycznym charakterem organizacji. Strategia SOK jest jednak przemyślana. Wynika z filozofii efektywnego altruizmu i nadrzędnej misji organizacji – dążenia do zmiany społecznej, która ma przynieść koniec eksploatacji zwierząt. Artykuł stanowi podsumowanie badań zrealizowanych na podstawie analizy danych zastanych, kwerendy z zakresu produkcji i dystrybucji filmowej, nowych mediów i edukacji medialnej, a także dziewięciu wywiadów indywidualnych przeprowadzonych z aktywistami.

