Navigating Distant Worlds: Interactive web documentary and engagement with issues of international development and social change
WHilst the use of documentary film to mediate issues of international development and social change is nothing new, the tools of production, media environment, expectations of, and relationships between, audiences and content are evolving at a rapid pace, bringing new approaches and challenges. As INGOs, development agencies and media producers attempt to engage audiences in issues of international development and social change in an increasing saturated media environment, many are looking for more innovative, Web 2.0-native ways of presenting these issues. Interactive web documentary, a format that has emerged from the dynamic and frenetic Web 2.0 media environment, combining digital, interactive and social media with the documentary form, has begun to be used to communicate with and engage audiences in these issues. But how do audiences respond to this format? Within this paper I investigate, through a survey of three audience groups and two case study examples, supplemented by semi-structured qualitative interviews and focus group discussion, how interactive web documentary might affect audience engagement with issues of international development and social change. In so doing I uncover three modes of engagement: active engagement, emotional engagement and critical engagement, which appear to be enhanced by the format. At the same time I discuss barriers to engagement, such as access, audience interest and tensions between discourses of gaming and issues of international development and social change, all of which must be negotiated if the format is to succeed in its aims.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Within this chapter I shall briefly introduce the background to my research and research aims, as well as providing brief explanations of key concepts that I will be using within this paper.

1.1 Documentary and international development and social change

From the first days of the Lumière Brothers’ motion pictures through to the modern day, documentary film has been a favoured tool for representing, investigating and interpreting the human world (Galloway, McAlpine & Harris, 2007: 325) – often seeking to enquire into some of the most complex issues that underpin society and bringing previously unheard voices into the public sphere (Gifreu, 2011: 2).

It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that filmmakers, NGOs and development agencies have often turned to the documentary format to raise awareness, engage audiences and delve deeper into the issues of international development and social change about which they are concerned.

1.2 The Web 2.0

Whilst the use of documentary film to mediate issues of international development and social change is nothing new, the format itself, tools of production, media environment, expectations of and relationships between audiences and content, are evolving at a rapid pace, bringing new approaches and challenges. With the rise of the Web 2.0, characterised by the proliferation of social media and other increasingly interactive media technologies, there has been a dramatic increase not only in the range of tools available to cultural producers but also the possibilities these tools hold. As Leah Lievrouw explains, the explosion in opportunities for interactivity and networking online has allowed for a newly active and creative relationship to be born:

*Whereas Web 1.0 opened up an imponderably large universe of documents and information on demand, the twenty-first century Web 2.0 links this power of global information search and retrieval with the personal involvement, interaction, and collaborative creativity of people linked to one another in complex, far flung social and technological networks. (Lievrouw, 2011: 177)*
Driven by the dual goal of informing and provoking action or change, those involved in international development and social change communications (from NGOs to development agencies, activist groups and independent media professionals) have begun to discover new ways of approaching their communications output that make use of these new technologies and potentially change the way they engage audiences.

1.3 Interactive web documentary

Indeed, small numbers of INGOs, such as Save the Children and Christian Aid, newspapers, such as the Guardian and New York Times, and independent documentary producers have started to harness the tools of the Web 2.0 in their creative work - blending different media, including stills, moving image, audio and 360 degree immersive virtual environments with social media, gaming and other interactive technologies - to create interactive web documentaries that mediate issues of international development and social change.

Hosted on the web for the most part and available for download on multiple devices, these documentaries promise immersive experiences, transporting the viewer into the documentary story. The interactive web documentary places the viewer in a new position of agency, often being given control over the direction of the narrative, what is seen, when and how. As Lievrouw explains, these new qualities could be said to create a new experience of engagement:

‘The immediacy, responsiveness, and social presence of information and other people that new media users experience constitute a qualitatively different experience of engagement with media’ (Lievrouw, 2011: 13).

Some media practitioners, commentators, development agencies and academics are speaking with excitement about interactive web documentary and its potential for engaging audiences in issues of international development and social change - particularly by offering several different perspectives around one topic rather than one clear narrative; giving the user more control; and using social and interactive media to create a closer connection between the subjects of a documentary and the user. In turn there are also reservations amongst others, concerned with the challenges of the frenetic Web 2.0 media environment, as well as the tensions and limitations of using interactive web documentary to mediate the
often complex and politically loaded issues of international development and social change (Smith, 2011; Scott, forthcoming).

1.4 Research aim and research questions

Whilst small numbers of media practitioners and academics have begun to debate the potential of interactive web documentary there are some key elements of the discussion that appear to have received little attention: 1. How do audiences feel about interactive web documentary? What effect does the interactive format have upon the ways that they engage with the content? What are the benefits to audience engagement of using the interactive format? 2. What potential might this format hold for engaging audiences in issues of international development and social change?

The aim of this study is thus to investigate how the interactive web documentary format might affect engagement with issues of international development and social change.

To carry out this investigation I shall undertake a mixed method approach, involving a survey questionnaire with three ‘audience’ groups and semi-structured qualitative and focus group style interviews, all based on two case study examples of interactive web documentary that deal with issues of international development and social change.

1.5 Relevance of my research

Within the development studies, cultural studies and media studies fields respectively there is a large body of research that has investigated how issues of international development and social change are represented and interpreted through different types of media texts, including documentary (Hall, 1997; Wilkins, 2008; Servaes, 2008; Gillespie & Toynbee, 2006; Rose, 2001; Scott, forthcoming). There has also been extensive academic research and theoretical study on how issues of international development and social change are perceived by audiences as a result of these media communications (Tufte & Enghel, 2011; Harding, 2009; Scott, 2010; Scott, 2011; Scott, forthcoming). Similarly, there is much debate regarding the impact of new media tools on development communications, with many disputing the validity of claims that new media holds the answer to activism and engagement with international development and social change (Pieterse, 2009; Morozov, 2012; Morozov, 2013; Taub, 2012; Smith, 2011; Scott, forthcoming). There is also
academic work that attempts to define interactive web documentary, confronts interactive media and civic engagement and theorises media and civic participation respectively (Gaudenzi, 2012; Gifreu, 2011; Carpentier, 2008; Couldry, 2008; Dahlgren, 2005; Dahlgren, 2007; Jenkins, 2006). All of these research areas inform my own work in this paper. There is relatively little academic research however that looks specifically at the interactive web documentary format in terms of audience engagement in issues of international development and social change. This is the gap that I wish to bridge within my research.

1.6 Key concepts
Within this research there are a number of key concepts that demand clarification. Further expansion of some of these will be carried out in the literature review section of this paper, however brief outlines are provided below for clarity.

**International development and social change**

*International development* and *social change* are both terms that are not only complexly theorised (Pieterse, 2009) but are also understood in different ways within different contexts.

*International development* is the most commonly used term to describe the field of practice and study that seeks to improve the living standards—economically, politically and socially—of those living in poverty, specifically in countries without the resources, or in some cases the infrastructure or political will, to carry out this work alone. It is this term that is most often employed to describe the practices of INGOs, multilateral and bilateral agencies working to achieve these ‘development’ goals. However, it is worth noting that an implicit distinction is often identified within the use of this term, between wealthy nations in the Global North, who provide this assistance, and those countries in the Global South, upon whom the ‘development’ is carried out (Wilkins, 2008). In recent years understandings of development have been extended to reach outside of this binary comparison between wealthy nations and those with less resources, acknowledging that social and political progress must be made on a global scale in order to effect real change. As such the term social change has begun to be used more widely to speak to a broader sense of global progress that side steps the politically loaded comparison between the ‘developed’ and ‘under-developed’ worlds (Ibid). In this paper, I have combined these two terms to refer to
any issue that relates to these concepts of social progress and the improvement of living standards for those living in poverty.

Engagement

Engagement is another term that is often used to mean different things in different contexts. I should therefore clarify the combined contexts within which the term is employed in this paper. These are arguably threefold: First, I am looking at engagement in the context of media, so how people react and respond to the media text of the interactive web documentary. Second, I am looking at engagement in the context of international development and social change, so the ways in which the media text affects how audiences or users react and respond to issues of international development and social change. Third, I touch on the broader context of engagement ‘with the world’ through participation, so how participation in and through the interactive web documentary (Carpentier, 2011) might allow a broader engagement ‘with the world’.

Audiences/users

The concepts of the audience and the user have become contested notions in the new media environment, within which this paper positions itself. Traditional use of the term audience has been criticised for an inference of singularity or homogeneity (Livingstone, 2007) wherein the audience is conceived of as a coherent group or mass that is in some way connected or consistent in its responses to and engagement with media content (Carpentier, 2008). The multiplicity of interests, cultural and political backgrounds, not to mention rapidly changing media consumption habits of those who constitute an audience, make it problematic to conceive of a coherent group (De Jong, 2008: 218). Moreover, within the new media environment, where publics are able to be ever more selective in the media they consume, including when and how they consume it, the idea that there is a coherent group that constitutes the audience is further problematized. Whilst the singular understanding of the audience as a coherent group is problematic there is yet to emerge another collective noun that as succinctly describes those who come to consume media content. Thus I continue to refer to audiences within this paper, however in doing so I acknowledge the plurality of interests and backgrounds of those who come to consume media. For me, the audience is a collective term for a group of individuals, with individual interests etc., who consume a certain piece of media content. When I speak of attempts to ‘engage audiences’ I thus refer to attempts to engage groups of individuals.
In the context of interactive web documentary the term ‘user’ is often employed to replace the audience. The argument here is that the term audience infers a passivity that relates to one-way communication and consumption (Livingstone, 2004). Within the more dynamic, dialogic context of online media and particularly interactive media, such as interactive web documentary, the audience is conceptualised as the active user. I therefore refer to users when dealing with interactive web documentary or online media and audiences when speaking about offline media, such as documentary, or as a collective term for those consuming media content.

**Interactive web documentary**

There are many different ‘forms’ of interactive web documentary, with different levels and ‘modes’ of interactivity (Gaudenzi, 2012) and moreover, many different understandings and terminologies used to conceptualise the field. New media documentary, transmedia documentary, web-docs, web-native documentary, docu-games, alternate realities docs, digital interactive docs and interactive web documentary are just a few of the terms being used, often interchangeably, to describe what has emerged from experimentation with interactive and new media technologies and the documentary form (Ibid). Within this paper I refer to interactive web documentary. Interactive web documentary refers to the hybrid form of documentary film and online interactive media, that uses virtual landscapes, 360 degree imaging, audio, video, and social media, to create navigable and often immersive media texts that are hosted online. The format demands some form of participation from its users, who retain responsibility for how and in which direction information is discovered and narrative unfolds. Whilst the nature and degree of interactivity varies widely amongst different interactive web documentaries, a constant characteristic is the movement away from authoritative linear narrative towards user control (Gifreu, 2011).
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Within the following section of this paper I will unpack relevant academic theory and research that provides the framework for my study.

2.1 Media and connecting citizens with other worlds

The media - be it broadcast, print or online, in the form of news, documentary or entertainment - has since the days of the first printing press been conceptualized as, amongst many other things, a portal to other worlds; making information accessible about people, places, politics and cultures that lie beyond audiences’ own lived experience (Anderson, 1996).

With the advance of media technology, this role has grown from strength to strength, with a free (in the liberal sense) media becoming, for citizens with access, a primary tool through which they are able to see and understand the world around them; bringing what is geographically distant closer to hand and connecting us with the lives and experiences of those who are distant from us – in geography or lived experience (Appadurai 1990; Anderson, 1996; Tomlinson 1999; Kyriakidou 2009). Indeed, media images and factual content remain one of the most powerful ways through which publics are able not only to visualise and imagine experiences beyond their own, but also that the idea of difference or ‘otherness’, in terms of human, political or cultural experience, is performed, confronted and understood (Chouliaraki, 2008).

2.2 Documentary

The documentary is a format that has traditionally been associated with providing these representations and negotiations of distant worlds (Nichols, 2001). Indeed the documentary film is often seen as one of the most trusted factual mediums through which the lives of others are represented and observations are made about other ‘cultures, politics, ideologies and people’ (Gifreu, 2011: 2) speaking about the world ‘through sounds and images.’ (Nichols, 2001: 42)\(^1\)

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1 According to Bill Nichols, documentary is ‘a fuzzy concept’ (Nichols, 1991: 21) which takes a privileged position
As documentary uniquely straddles fact and fiction in its mode of production, often employing tools more commonly associated with fiction, according to documentary theorist Bill Nichols (2001), it should not be interpreted as the ‘reproduction of reality’ but rather should be seen as ‘a representation of the world we occupy’ (Nichols, 2001: 20 in Gaudenzi, 2012: 33). By providing this representation of that which is otherwise distant from us, documentary is said to be able to play a unique mediating role between society and itself, allowing ‘one part of a society to see another…’ (de Jong, 2008:2).

2.2.1 Documentary and engaging audiences in issues of international development and social change

Indeed, during the 20th and 21st Centuries, this role of documentary has arguably taken precedence, with the format becoming a common tool for influence, debate and even activism, increasingly relied upon by those wishing to report, uncover and raise awareness over global socio-political issues, including those related to international development and social change. This has led documentary in the 21st Century to be identified as having been ‘as much about changing the world as it was observing it’, engaging audiences in ‘arguments about our shared world, propositions about the world that are made as part of a process of social praxis’ (Dovey & Rose, 2012: 3).

But what is it about documentary that makes it such an effective tool for mediating perspectives and issues from around the world and engaging audiences in these?

One argument states that in realistically representing the world around us, including the lived experience of those that are distant from us, documentary establishes emotional connections between audiences and ‘distant others’. Rob Stone (2002) argues that the documentary, by confronting audiences with the human reality of distant people and places, increases viewers’ awareness of their action or inaction and in turn how that might be connected to the fate of those that are being observed (Stone, 2002: 218). He credits this as having the potential for transforming viewers’ engagement with global issues, making them more emotionally connected. In this sense, documentary has been said to facilitate the

2 The work of filmmakers such as Michael Moore, Werner Herzog and Morgan Spurlock, as well as Al Gore’s infamous *An Inconvenient Truth* and Invisible Children’s *Kony 2012*, are just a small number of a growing canon of international development and social change related documentaries. It is their popular success that has arguably encouraged charities, NGOs and development agencies to adopt the genre to mediate their respective international development and social change messages for mass audiences (Ellis, 2005: 327).
creation of an imagined ‘global citizenry’, whom develop a shared sense of transnational or cosmopolitan civic responsibility towards those in other parts of the world (Nash, 2008: 168; Anderson, 1996; Kyriakidou, 2009). As Martha Nussbaum explains in her work on ‘narrative art’, documentary has ‘the power to make us see the lives of the different with more than a casual tourist’s interest – with involvement and sympathetic understanding...’ (Nussbaum, 1997 in Stone, 2002: 218).

2.2.2 Problematizing documentary and audience engagement with issues of international development and social change

However, many do not share Stone and Nussbaum’s optimism, in terms of the relationship of engagement that is developed between the viewer and the subject within documentary, particularly when dealing with the often politically loaded issues of international development and social change. Indeed whilst the media, and more specifically documentary, has been credited with connecting the otherwise distant, developing feelings of shared humanity or empathy (Nash, 2008), it has equally been accused of doing the opposite. Jean Baudrillard (1995) explains that audiences of documentaries that depict distant suffering, for example, are in the act of passively watching, always conscious of their ability to walk away or switch off. This awareness means that the ‘mediated face’ on our screens in fact makes no tangible demand on us, as it would if we were actually confronted with the situation being depicted. In fact, the increasing prevalence of ‘shocking’ or morally antagonistic media images, through documentary, news or indeed NGO campaign materials, has been said to have led to the television or computer screen having an ‘anesthetising’ (Chouliaraki 2006:25) effect upon audiences, removing us from the moral demands of distant suffering and rendering us disengaged. As Zygmunt Bauman (1993:177) put it,

‘There is, comfortingly, a glass screen to which their lives are confined... They become flattened out, a property only of the screen, a surface, denied any moral compulsion because they are, disembodied and disindividuated... something other than human’ (quoted in Scott, forthcoming).

This line of critical reflection can be expanded in light of recent research into how audiences respond to documentary about international development and social change. Research has shown that in the UK, for example, often people identify media content about developing countries, including documentary, as being ‘boring’, ‘depressing’ or ‘too worthy’, therefore choosing to switch off and avoid engaging with the issues they present
(DFID, 2000; Scott, 2011). Rather than being a problem inherent to the issues themselves, this behaviour has been linked to a lack of innovation in the approach taken to documentaries dealing with what are perceived as the difficult and complex issues that come under international development and social change (Scott, 2011). The prevalence of entertainment content and the cultural emphasis upon consumption within the modern media environment, encouraging publics to consume and be entertained rather than be challenged and engaged through media (Dahlgren, 2003: 151), has also been pointed to as consequent to this audience reaction (Scott, 2011).

Despite these limitations and critical reflections, documentary arguably still has an important role to play in engaging publics in issues of international development and social change. Indeed, research has equally shown that documentaries on issues of international development and social change can draw large audiences, so long as the approach taken to the documentary is innovative and engaging (Scott, Jenner & Smith, 2012). Similarly, an IPPR and ODI report on UK attitudes to international development and aid, revealed that ‘there was considerable appetite amongst respondents for greater understanding of development and for more complex stories of how change and progress happens, to be communicated through the media’ (Glennie, Straw & Wild, 2012: 2).

Having outlined considerations around the use of documentary to engage audiences in issues of international development and social change, I shall now turn to look at the modern media environment in which these types of communications are operating.

2.3 The modern (new) media environment

In 2013, media, communications and development practitioners alike are operating within a rapidly evolving media landscape. With the rise of the so-called Web 2.0 - from the development of new media technologies, tablets, smart phones and broadband to digital and social media - we now have more choice, more freedom and more control over how, where and what media we consume than we have arguably ever had before (Livingstone, 2004). Those with access to the Internet are now able to experience media in different ways to previous generations – indeed you may click, share, post, create, game, interact and connect via new media tech without a second thought, hundreds of times a day (Lievrouw, 2011). Furthermore, the acts of viewing and reading have now converged with shopping, playing, voting, researching, writing and chatting so that media can be used ‘anyhow, anyplace,
anytime’ (Livingstone, 2004). For media consumers, this relatively newfound agency to interact, participate and create can be both exciting and overwhelming. With so much information and so many different media offerings just a click away on the seemingly infinite World Wide Web, users can find themselves imposing their own restrictions, consuming the same media content from the same providers that reflect their already held beliefs, rather than confronting the challenge of trawling the Web to seek out new information and different perspectives. (Mouffe in Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006: 968; Scott, forthcoming)

In this over-saturated, content rich but time and attention poor environment, it has been found to be increasingly difficult to engage audiences in content that might be outside of their usual media consumption habits (Scott, Rodriguez-Rojas & Jenner, 2011). Issues of international development and social change are arguably just such an example of something that lies outside of mainstream media consumption. Indeed, the European Commission’s 2005 Eurobarometer report and the United Nations Foundation’s 2010 Index of Public Opinion on International Assistance report found that 88% of EU citizens and 89% of citizens in the United States had not heard of the Millennium Development Goals (European Commission, 2005; United Nations Foundation, 2010 in Scott, forthcoming).

Communications professionals trying to engage audiences in issues of international development and social change are thus working in a challenging environment. Not only is there more content out there distracting potential audiences but also media consumers are becoming increasingly used to more interactive forms of media and are arguably expecting a more interactive, Web 2.0 experience from what they consume (Cammaerts, 2008).

2.3.1 The audience in the web 2.0

I shall now turn to look more specifically at the effect the Web 2.0 media environment has upon the relationship between audiences and media content.

There are arguably specific characteristics that have been identified in the modern media environment that have effected the way audiences behave, respond and engage with media content today. It is important to understand these if we are to better understand both the issues confronting engagement and the new relationships of engagement between audiences and online media.
**Convergence**

The creation of the diverse new media technologies that are now available to us online has arguably involved the convergence of both ‘old’ and ‘new’ technologies and mediums (Lister et al., 2003: 34). This in turn has brought the convergence of different forms of communication, from one-to-one, to one-to-many and many-to-many, blending these to allow users of the Web 2.0 to reach farther and ‘do more’ with the communications and media technologies they are now able to access and use. Through blogs, vlogs, wikis, social bookmarking, social media, gaming platforms, multimedia sharing and podcasting, many different types of media and modes of communication can be employed by media consumers across multiple platforms, at the click of a button, often from one device and even all at the same time (Jenkins, 2006: 4). Henry Jenkins, in his book *Convergence Culture*, argues that this convergence represents ‘a shift in our relations with popular culture’ which in turn has implications for how audiences ‘learn, work, participate in the political process, and connect with other people around the world’ (Ibid: 7)

**Interactivity**

According to Peter Dahlgren (2006), the modern media environment is ‘diversifying, specialising, globalising, and becoming more interactive’ (Dahlgren, 2006: 114). Indeed, a key characteristic of the reinvigorated, converging media environment is audience interactivity, a term that is often used without clear definition. Interactivity in relation to new media is defined in The Oxford English Dictionary (2005: 901) as ‘allowing a two-way flow of information between a computer or other electronic device and a user, responding to the user's input’ (Galloway, McAlpine & Harris, 2007: 328). The majority of the ‘new media’ tools made available by the Web 2.0, can be said to have some form of interactive component or potential, facilitating interaction between different networked groups as well as between users and media content itself (Carpentier, 2011: 116). This heightened level of interactivity has created not just new online media texts and formats but different ways for audiences to be entertained, consume and engage with media and even new ways of ‘representing the world’ (Lister et al., 2003: 12)

**Participation**

A product - or potential product- of this more interactive environment, which has been celebrated by some and viewed more sceptically by others, is a sense of increased audience or user participation. Howard Rheingold argues that 'the unique power of the new media
regime is precisely its participatory potential’ (Rheingold, 2008: 100). Indeed a popular supposition is that interactive media allows for audiences ‘to express themselves, to connect to others and to participate’ (Bardoel, 2007: 45). The argument is not that ‘old’ media did not provide opportunities for participation (Cammaerts, 2008:13), but rather, Web 2.0 technologies have opened up more popular and accessible methods and spaces for active engagement by audiences through participation (Carpentier, 2009: 410). It is worth noting here that participation is a complex and contested notion. Indeed for some the widespread use of the term ‘has tended to mean that any precise, meaningful content has almost disappeared’ (Pateman, 1970:1 in Carpentier and De cleen, 2008: 1).

There are arguably two main levels at which one can theorise audience participation in the Web 2.0 environment. The first, most basic, level of participation is between the audience and the media content itself or ‘participation in the media’ (Carpentier, 2011: 67, emphasis in original). In enabling media consumers to become involved in the creation, dissemination and critique of media content, as is today increasingly the case online, audiences participate in the generation and sustenance of online media texts. From the simple act of sharing to user-generated content, audience feedback, online forums for discussion and debate, social media and gaming, these participatory elements of online media have been credited with facilitating a transformation within the formerly passive audience (Rosen, 2008), to become more engaged participants and even online cultural producers or ‘produsers’ (Dahlgren, 2013: 401; Schäfer, 2011: 10; Jenkins, 2006: 5).

It is from here that the second level of participation is developed. As Sonia Livingstone (2005) explains,

‘It seems to be widely assumed that the internet can facilitate participation precisely because of its interactivity, encouraging its users to ‘sit forward’, click on the options, find the opportunities exciting, begin to contribute content, come to feel part of a community and so, perhaps by gradual steps, shift from acting as a consumer to increasingly (or in addition) acting as a citizen.’ (Livingstone, 2005: 5)

Livingstone outlines the assumption that there is a natural progression for those participating in media creation, dissemination and critique online- the so-called ‘produsers’ - to eventually engage through this process with more political forms of civic participation, from critical discussion and debate to political action. Nico Carpentier identifies this as ‘participation through the media’ (Carpentier, 2011: 67)
Whether or not participation by users in online media necessarily leads to civic participation through that process is fiercely contested amongst academics. Some argue that the Web 2.0 online environment has become the frontline of an evolving public sphere, allowing ‘engaged citizens to play a role in the development of new democratic politics…through the mediation of (political) debate and expanding the political’ (Dahlgren, 2005:160). Arguably in reaction to this sentiment, interactive and social media tools have been increasingly adopted by a number of interests, including international development and social change NGOs, development agencies and campaigning organisations, in order to organize and coordinate different forms of civic participation such as online activism and political action.

However, not everyone is so enthusiastic about the participatory and activist credentials of the new media landscape. Evgeny Morozov warns that reliance upon digital media to do all the work has led us into an era of ‘slacktivism’ where ‘penning a socially conscious Facebook status’ is deemed enough to change the world (Morozov, 2011: 204). Indeed, online participation, does not necessarily equal positive action or civic participation, and can in fact often serve to do little more than make publics feel better, more useful and more important, whilst ‘having previously little political impact’ (Fenton in Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007: 235).

Global networked communications

Whilst the basic concept of the network might not be a new one within the online environment, according to Manuel Castells what is new is the ‘global reach’ of this ‘networked architecture’ (Castells, 2009: 28). The rapid increase in the number of users online, coupled with the technological advances of social media networks and other interactive, networked media, has led to the establishment of globally reaching networks for connection and communication between users. Indeed, it is not just machines that are globally connected any longer but people too (Schäfer, 2011: 10). These networks have arguably brought with them new ways of thinking about community in the online environment, as well as ‘shifts in the personal and social experience of time, space, and place’ for audiences, which ‘have implications for the ways in which we experience ourselves and our place in the world’ (Lister et al, 2003: 12). Indeed, many are asking if perhaps these networked tools present new opportunities for connecting us to distant worlds and distant others in more meaningful and rewarding ways, (Dahlgren, 2007: 114). As Maria Kyriakidou argues, ‘It is mainly through the ‘informational and experiential mobility
made possible by global networked infrastructures’ (Hier 2008: 42) that the recognition of
global interconnections and dependencies and, thus, the perception of the world as a whole
is taking place’ (Kyriakidou 2009: 484). Others suggest, this global network potential
provides access for a wider range of voices and perspectives (Couldry, 2008), allowing
online users to connect with and gain new perspectives, for example on the complex issues
that constitute international development and social change.

At the same time, a note of caution must be sounded. A general culture of overestimation
has also been identified, in the connective, equalising and democratic power of the Internet
and digital technology in general, which is accused of ignoring the cultural, political,
economic and social factors that influence our life offline, implicitly assuming the Web
operates in a vacuum from these issues (O’Neil, 2005:4 in Cammaerts, 2008: 14). Issues
such as access, or lack thereof, to the Internet, summarized as the Digital Divide; corporate
control and ownership of new media; Internet freedom and the abuse of online
technologies for the purposes of repression by Governments and authoritarian regimes; how
users actually interact with the Internet and whether this does in fact equate to genuine
action and participation are all issues that the ‘popular discourse’ on the transformative
power of Web 2.0 apparently chooses to ignore. Instead, this discourse is accused of
focusing on ‘a positive utopia’ that presents new media technology, the computer, the
mobile phone and wireless communication within ‘a rhetoric of promise, which envision[s]
a brighter future’ (Schäfer, 2011: 25).

2.4 Documentary 2.0: Interactive web documentary

‘In the 20th century we got spoken to in the language of film... in the 21st century we get to talk
back’ (Lambert, 2006b)

Documentary film producers have arguably been at the forefront of a wave of new media
experimentation in the Web 2.0 media environment (Kat Cizek, 2013) with documentary
content increasingly being made available online or having some online media element - be
that a website with further information, a campaign page or social media links within the
film. On the more progressive end of the spectrum however, the characteristics of the Web
2.0 outlined above have facilitated the convergence of digital, social and new media with
the documentary format, to create the interactive web documentary (Gifreu, 2011).

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3 For example, YouTube being owned by Google
If documentary is a slippery term to define, interactive web documentary perhaps proves an even tougher adversary. First, it is a relatively young and thus under-theorized format, with scarce critical analysis having been carried out. It is also part of an extremely broad and rapidly evolving field, with advances in technology and new approaches emerging all the time. These two facts combined make the project of studying the genre particularly challenging (Gaudenzi 2012: 4).

At first glance, a simple definition of what constitutes an interactive web documentary could be: any documentary that uses audience interactivity as its primary mechanism for delivering information (Galloway et al, 2007: 331). Whilst a good starting point, this definition demands some refinement. Perhaps then a comparative approach that starts with what interactive web documentary is not, might be useful. Within this thesis and the field of enquiry more generally, interactive web documentary is not simply documentary hosted on the web, mobile phones, tablets or digital media platforms. These productions generally come under the term ‘web documentary’. Interactive web documentary, whilst it is often supported by these platforms, is ontologically different.

**Key characteristic I: User participation**

A key feature that separates interactive web documentary from other forms of documentary is the fact that it makes specific demands of its audience that the traditional documentary does not. Interactive web documentary transforms its audience into active users by demanding that they must participate in some form of physical interactivity within the media text, which goes beyond the ‘mental act of interpretation’ of the content provided (Gaudenzi, 2012: 14). For example the user must use the mouse and keyboard to click on and navigate a virtual setting, add content, pose or answer questions (Gifreu, 2011: 3).

But still, these qualities alone do not go far enough to defining interactive web documentary, as they could conceivably encompass certain forms of web documentary that are not strictly within the realms of the interactive. For example, Invisible Children’s *Kony 2012* film launched online and required of its viewers to click and share the documentary after viewing, a basic form of physical interaction. Whilst the film achieved global viral success through the harnessing of social media, the content itself takes the form of the traditional linear format. It is simply hosted and distributed on the web, rather than being interactive in the true sense (O’Flynn, 2012).
Key characteristic II: Subverting linear narrative

Another significant element of interactive web documentary then, which differentiates it from other forms of documentary, relates to linearity or more precisely non-linearity and user control. Most documentaries follow a standard linear narrative, controlled by the filmmaker, which unfolds on the screen in front of the viewer. The viewer in this instance does not have a role to play in the unfolding of the narrative, beyond the mental act of interpretation mentioned above. In interactive web documentary, linearity is, to more or less an extent according to the levels and modes of interactivity available, subverted (Gifreu, 2011). Whilst the viewer, turned user, is provided with a starting point and skeleton structure by the filmmaker, within which to navigate, there are various different ways the narrative can unfold, according to the choices made by the user. Thus linear narrative is disrupted and the content can only progress in response to input from the user (Gaudenzi, 2012; Gifreu, 2011; Galloway et al, 2007) who is empowered to choose not only what content they view but also in what order they view it (Carolyn Handler Miller, 2004: 345). This is taken further in some examples of interactive web documentary where users are even able to contribute content, creating new, organic narratives and perspectives that are beyond the control of the filmmaker.

Key characteristic III: Multiple perspectives

A side effect of the disruption of linearity in the interactive web documentary is the creation of space for multiple perspectives to be communicated through the text. Indeed, some interactive web documentaries choose to emphasise this capacity in their structure, moving away from the singular authorial narrative traditionally associated with documentary, towards a more multi-layered representation of different issues, interests and perspectives (Gifreu, 2011). As Sandra Gaudenzi (2012) explains, the subversion of linear narrative moves the interactive web documentary away from the singular authorial perspective and towards an affordance for the ‘creation of debate’ (Gaudenzi, 2012: 36).

For example, the interactive web documentary Gaza Sderot: Life in spite of everything uses a split screen presentation, allowing two streams of content to be viewed simultaneously. The content on the left hand side of the screen consists of interviews with Palestinians in Gaza and on the right hand side of the screen interviews with Israeli’s in neighbouring Sderot, allowing audiences access to two perspectives simultaneously and the opportunity to compare and contrast. Other examples allow users to pull content from side bars onto the
main screen or present mosaic tiles or reference points containing different content that can be clicked on in whatever order the user wishes.

Figure 1: Gaza Sderot – an interactive web documentary that uses split screen to deliver the dichotomous sides of the story of two communities, one in Palestine and one in Israel, impacted by the same conflict.

Figure 2: LEFT: Iraq: 10 years, 100 viewpoints uses a mosaic structure to present different media that represents different perspectives on Iraq, from locals, journalists, commentators etc. RIGHT Alma: A Tale of Violence blends straight to camera first person narrative with interactive stills, illustration, audio and video that can be pulled onto screen to create a split screen format.

Key characteristic IV: Immersion and simulation

A further characteristic of many interactive web documentaries is immersion or simulation, where users are to more or less an extent according to the approach taken, immersed in the ‘reality’ that is being represented in the documentary - through the use of 360-degree stills, video and audio and even full 3D imaging - creating navigable landscapes. This approach is built, according to Immersive Journalism expert, Nonny de la Peña, not with the sole aim of representing the facts of a given situation, as is arguably the case of linear documentary, but is rather concerned with providing ‘the opportunity to experience “the facts”’ (de la Peña et al, 2010: 301 in Gaudenzi, 2012: 44). The idea behind this is that audiences are given the opportunity to learn through first person experience, instead of gaining knowledge through a third person explanation (Gaudenzi, 2012: 44).
One of the latest examples of this approach is the *Fort McMoney* project, which allows users to navigate the Canadian oil-town of Fort McMurray in order to uncover the issues that affect the community and environment.

![Figure 2: Fort McMoney – an interactive web documentary that employs a clickable 360 degree immersive virtual landscape.](image)

**Key characteristic V: Play**

The immersive approach taken in many interactive web documentaries is something that has led to the format often being likened to videogames. Immersion and simulation are typically characteristics that are recognised within the context of gaming and indeed many interactive web documentaries explicitly use aspects of the video game discourse to represent other worlds and engage audiences. Those interactive web documentaries that emphasise this aspect are often known as docu-games, wherein audiences are invited to ‘play’ within specific scenarios and thus learn through that process. Whilst video games are traditionally related to as a fictional, entertainment genre, the docu-game attempts to straddle fact and fiction, ‘striving ‘for ‘facticity’ or ‘documentarity’’ in order to ‘expose players to events and places that would remain inaccessible to them otherwise’ (Raessens, 2006: 215). The strategy of employing gaming discourse also speaks to an attempt to engage through entertainment, giving the user ‘a sensation of deep immersion [that] stops their learning from being boring...’(Gifreu, 2011: 10) Indeed, some argue immersion in the reality of the interactive web documentary, while offering users all kinds of possibilities to participate, for example in making choices with moral implications, transforms play into ‘a meaningful, interactive experience’ (Raessens, 2006: 216).

2.5 **Interactive web documentary and audience engagement with issues of international development and social change**

‘Interactivity is a way to position ourselves in the world, to perceive it and to make sense of it’ (Gaudenzi, 2012: 70).
One of the claims that has been made regarding the characteristics of the Web 2.0 that were outlined earlier is that they serve to make the world smaller. Indeed, Denis Kennedy (2009) argues that the Internet has the potential for helping audiences to ‘better visualise and know a place’ through supplementing media content with links and extra content. Interactive web documentary arguably takes this potential further.

Indeed, interactive web documentary has been pitched by some as the ideal blend of documentary film’s ability to provide viewers with information about other worlds and the connective potential of Web 2.0 interactive media, resulting in the format being able to potentially provide ‘more meaningful documentaries’ (Gifreu, 2011: 11) that allow users the opportunity to have experiences, see and gain multiple perspectives on complex global issues. Some have gone so far as to argue that in simulating far off places interactive web documentaries could ‘elicit a more emotive, engaged response’ from audiences (Watkins 2010).

In the context of communicating issues of international development and social change the potential for increased connectivity with the distant other – akin to that identified by Stone (2012) – through mitigating distance and allowing room for multidimensional portrayals of development issues (Kennedy, 2009) is a potentially exciting prospect, as information that promotes ‘an emotional connection’ has been identified as a key factor in changing public perceptions of developing countries, international development and social change (VSO 2001: 12 in Smith, 2011).

But whilst the interactive web documentary potentially provides new ways of negotiating distance, via immersive simulation, new means of communicating multiple perspectives and breaking down complex issues via non linear structures, and increased opportunity for mobilizing and provoking action via increased user control and social media, what do the audience think? Do audiences perceive the same sorts of opportunities? How do they respond to them? Do they respond differently to the way in which academic theory and filmmakers predict? In short, how do audiences really feel about the interactive web documentary and how does it affect the way they engage with issues of international development and social change?
3.1 Method choice and justification

In order to investigate how engagement with issues of international development and social change was affected by the use of the interactive web documentary format, I chose to take both a quantitative and a qualitative approach. In this regard I selected two case study examples of interactive web documentary that communicate issues of international development and social change and carried out audience research based on these case studies, via a survey questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion. My hope, in taking the mixed method approach of combining the quantitative survey method with qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus group questioning was to take steps towards the triangulation research strategy (Patriarche et al, 2012). As the interactive web documentary format itself, and indeed how it is experienced, is complex – combining different types of media, different forms of interaction and provoking different responses from different users dependent upon background, experience etc. – I wanted to create a methodology that allowed me to gain more in depth insights into this complexity. Whilst resources, time and the boundaries of this research have not allowed me to adopt several different methods, as is characteristic of the triangulation strategy, the selection of my range of methods goes some way towards gaining a more nuanced understanding as well as improving the range and depth of my data (Pickering, 2008: 101).

3.2 Method implementation

My two case studies were presented to three different groups of participants - the details of which will be expanded upon in section 3.3. Participants were either led through the interactive web documentary they were given, in a group environment, or were left to interact directly with the case study on their own. A case study specific survey questionnaire was then distributed after viewing/interacting (see Appendix A). Participants were asked to either complete the questionnaire in situ at the time of viewing/interacting or to complete it online at home. The online survey was created using Google Forms and the data from all surveys, including those completed in hard copy, was collated in an online database on Google Drive. A total of 96 respondents participated in the surveys across both case studies (a break down of respondents is given in section 3.4.1).
Candidates for semi-structured individual interviews and focus group style discussion were then selected, using two different methods. For case study 1, as participants experienced the interactive web documentary in a group environment where I was present, focus group style discussion was instigated with participants, where logistically possible. This discussion was recorded where possible. For case study 2, as participants were alone when they interacted with the interactive web documentary and filled in the survey online, a question was added asking if the respondent would be willing to participate in a Skype interview. Those who responded positively to this question were selected for a semi-structured qualitative follow up interview via Skype. Ten Skype interviews were carried out across both case studies.

Initial plans were also made to carry out participant observation for case study 1. This however proved unworkable due to a number of factors. First, the case study was screened in a cinema setting, meaning that when the lights were down it was difficult to see participants’ reactions to the case study. Second, participants were not able to interact directly with the case study in this setting and thus their visible reactions were not necessarily indicative of their impressions of the interactive experience itself – it was through the survey and focus group discussion that these impressions were probed and teased out (further discussion on this to follow). As I was not present when respondents interacted with case study 2, participant observation was unworkable here too.

In the following sections I shall provide more detailed discussion of my methodological approach, its limitations, any challenges within the research process and how I dealt with these.

3.3 Case studies

My initial project proposal stated my intention to use just one case study, however I soon discovered that a second case study was necessary in order to strengthen my research. This was due to a combination of factors. First, when it came to carrying out my research, the first case study was not ready to go ‘live’ and therefore was not available for participants to interact with directly online. As a result the respondents had to be led through the experience (critical reflection on this is provided in the latter limitations and challenges section). In order to address the fact that the respondents did not directly interact with the first case study themselves, I felt a second case study would be beneficial.
The first case study, The Awra Amba Experience (referred to as Awra Amba), is an interactive web documentary based on a small weaving community of the same name in Ethiopia, which is celebrated for its socially progressive way of life. The selection of this case study was made based on preliminary awareness of the project through my professional work, when I was introduced to Awra Amba as an example of an innovative project that had been funded by a media seed funding organisation I was working with.

Due to the fact that the interactive web documentary was not ready to go ‘live’ in time for the research to be carried out participants were led through the experience, displayed on a cinema screen, by the film’s producers who clicked on each piece of media content available, showing the different ways of navigating the ‘virtual village’ of Awra Amba and demonstrating the different options for interactivity. As such, participants were shown the ‘ideal user’s’ journey through the case study (further critical discussion on this can be found in section 3.6).

The second case study that I selected was Inside Disaster: Inside the Haiti Earthquake (referred to as Inside Disaster), an immersive interactive web documentary that invites users to experience the aftermath of the Haiti Earthquake. This particular case study was selected based on four criteria: 1. The interactive approach used within the interactive web documentary – I wanted this to be different to that taken in my first case study in order to broaden the breadth of my research; 2. The issues communicated within the interactive web documentary – these needed to be issues of international development or social change; 3. The accessibility of the interactive web documentary – it needed to be available for free to view online; and 4. The language of the documentary – it needed to be available in English as this was the primary language of my research. With these considerations in mind I carried out a scoping study of three online databases: MIT Moment’s of Innovation history of interactive documentary site (http://momentsofinnovation.mit.edu/interactive/), the French Arte TV web productions library (http://www.arte.tv/fr/toutes-les-webproductions/) and the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) DOCLAB database (http://www.doclab.org/category/projects/).

A link to this case study was sent to research participants via email, using contacts I had within the networks I had chosen to survey. Participants were asked within the email to follow the link to Inside Disaster and interact with it in their own time.
3.3.1 Description of case study 1: *The Awra Amba Experience*

*Aakra Amba* is an interactive web documentary created by independent production company Write This Down Productions. The project’s focus is the philosophy and lifestyle of a small weaving community called Awra Amba, in the Northern Amhara region of Ethiopia, which has gained local and international notoriety for its socially progressive philosophy and way of life – for example its rejection of foreign aid, belief in total gender equality and the choice of faith over religion. Produced in collaboration with the community, the project allows viewers to explore a virtual representation of the village (using animation, 360-degree stills photography, film and audio), meet the residents, hear, through audio and video, and discuss, through a discussion platform, the issues that are most important to the community.

*Aakra Amba’s* ‘homepage’, pictured above, consists of an animated representation of the village. This animation is a clickable, 360-degree environment, which houses ten individual clickable ‘huts’ or reference points.
Users can choose either to click on the ‘Map’ tab to discover the village, or simply click on each ‘hut’ individually from the homepage in whatever order they wish.

![Map of the village](image)

Each ‘hut’ houses a different theme chosen by the Awra Amba community as one of the ten most important social and development issues to their community. These issues are: Health, Equality, Marriage and Children, Sustainability, Entrepreneurship, Elderly Care, Democracy, Charity, Faith and Peace.

Once a ‘hut’ has been selected and clicked upon, the user is taken inside to see a 360-degree panoramic representation of its interior, made up of navigable stills photography. Within this environment, users are able to ‘look around’ and click on highlighted people and objects to access media content.
Each hut houses at least one short film based on the specific theme of that hut as well as extra media content such as historical background, statistics, images and links to other information.

The short films consist of straight to camera accounts and interviews with the Awra Amba community, giving their personal and communal views on a particular theme and how it relates to their way of life.
There is also a discussion platform integrated into the interactive web documentary, which allows users to comment and pose questions to the Awra Amba community as they navigate the virtual environment. Questions are translated into multiple languages and responses are provided by members of the Awra Amba community.

As a part of the launch of the project, over a period of 10 weeks, audiences will be invited to discuss the 10 themes via the discussion platform. In participating in this discussion, which involves interacting with the Awra Amba community and other viewers/users, each participant will contribute to a collective weaving project, managed by the Awra Amba community’s own micro finance weaving enterprise. Each contribution will be visualised as a new thread in a growing scarf, which will ultimately become the pattern for a fair trade product that will be made and sold by the community via the Awra Amba website.

3.3.2 Description of Case study 2: Inside Disaster: Inside the Haiti Earthquake

*Inside Disaster* is an immersive, interactive web documentary created by independent interactive productions company, PTV Productions. *Inside Disaster* employs simulation and immersion to represent the experience of the aid worker, the survivor and the journalist in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake. The project seeks to allow the user to explore the tensions inherent to disaster response and the different interests of those involved in these situations by inviting them to ‘play’ these roles and respond to different challenges written into the narrative.
On entering the *Inside Disaster* site the user is invited to choose from 3 perspectives through which to experience the interactive web documentary: the survivor, the aid worker and the journalist. Upon choosing which role to ‘play’, the user is presented with different scenarios and in turn must select their answer to questions on how to respond to these scenarios in order to meet the responsibilities and objectives of their particular role.

The user is offered a defined number of options for action in response to the questions posed and thus their experience unfolds according to their choices. As their experience develops, different content is accessed, such as video accounts, real footage, audio, stills photography and written text. Within the journalist role, the user is able to shoot video, using their cursor to direct the camera, as well as being inviting to edit their footage to create a final news package.
The ‘goal’ of the experience for the user is to try to successfully negotiate the moral, political and security tensions that exist in their chosen role, as well as navigating the tensions between themselves and those in other roles. If the decisions made by the user mean that their role cannot be successfully completed or becomes compromised, they are returned to the beginning and asked to ‘try again’ or make different choices.
3.4 Survey

My choice to engage the survey research method was motivated by a range of factors. The first was practical. As I was operating around a busy schedule of events organised for a film festival for the Awra Amba case study audience research, it proved unworkable in terms of time and resources to attempt one-to-one interviews with each participant. Similarly, as I was not able to be in-situ whilst participants interacted with the Inside Disaster case study I was again unable to carry out one-to-one interviews with each participant. The survey method thus presented an efficient, cost and time effective way of ensuring that I was able to gain feedback from the largest number of participants. Second, whilst the survey method is widely used to collect data about general attitudes and behaviours it can equally be beneficial for probing individual opinion and attitudes on subjects (Hansen, 2009: 225), it thus presented an effective option for accessing a wider sample of data.

3.4.1 Survey respondent selection process

The survey method is predominantly used to extrapolate general conclusions from research, by surveying representative samples of a population for example. Due to the restrictions in time and resources within this research I was unable to select a fully representative sample, I did however select my respondents to cover three rough demographics: the youth demographic (15-18), the university student demographic (undergraduate and graduate
level) and a more general adult demographic (aged 18+). I chose these groups in order to investigate the response of as wide a range of users as possible within my research.4

### 3.4.1.1 Schools group (Awra Amba)

The first survey group consisted of 40 school students in Oslo, Norway. The schools were initially invited to a screening of *Awra Amba* at a cinema in central Oslo as part of the Norwegian Film Festival, Films From the South. Prior to attending the screening the schools were contacted by the Film Festival and were invited to participate in my research. Written email consent was received from all of the schools to state that their students were willing to participate. Some of the participants in this survey group chose to complete the questionnaire in situ after the screening whilst others chose to fill it in online during their following class.

### 3.4.1.2 Mixed film festival audience (Awra Amba)

The second survey group consisted of a mixed public audience who attended an evening screening of *Awra Amba* in Oslo, Norway organised again by the Norwegian Film Festival, Films From the South. The audience for this event was around 90 people and 41 surveys were completed and returned. These surveys were completed in situ at the time of the screening.

### 3.4.1.3 University student group (Inside Disaster)

The third survey group consisted of graduate (Masters level) and undergraduate (Bachelors level) students studying the Communication for Development MA at Malmö University, Sweden, the Media and Development MA at University of East Anglia, UK and the Journalism BA at Oresünd University, Sweden. These particular groups of participants were selected due to the fact that I had points of access for each group, as a student of the Com Dev Masters, having worked with the course convenor of the UEA MA and via my MA supervisor, Johanna Stenerson. Each group of students was contacted via their respective tutor, who passed on an email authored by myself with a link to the film and a

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4 For a breakdown of age and nationality of each survey group please see Appendix C
3.5 Semi-structured qualitative interviews

Whilst the survey method allows one to pose questions investigating personal opinions and behaviours there is an inherent limit to the depth of data one can get from a set number and range of questions. I therefore decided to supplement the survey method with semi-structured qualitative interviews with a selection of respondents involved in both case studies.

3.5.1 Interviewee selection process

Within the survey questionnaire for Inside Disaster I asked respondents if they were willing to participate in a follow up Skype interview. Similarly, in the case of the Awra Amba participants, I contacted audience members who had supplied their email addresses and asked if they would be willing to participate in a one-to-one interview via Skype. A total of 10 participants, across both case studies, agreed to interviews, which were carried out via Skype between 21st November and 15th December 2013, between 2 weeks and one month from viewing the respective case studies (see Appendix B for the interview guide and example transcripts). These semi-structured interviews were based around the participants’ responses to the original survey, probing deeper their responses.

3.6 Limitations/challenges

‘There are ideal questionnaires and ideal methods but in the context of a carefully funded research project of limited duration, the ideal is soon reduced to the practicable and the feasible.’ (Hansen, 2009: 234).

The above quotation captures the essence of some of the limitations and challenges that I faced during both the design and execution of my research methodology.

General limitations

The first limitation of this project is tied to the fact that interactive web documentary is an under-theorized, diverse and ever changing creative field. There are many different ‘forms’ of interactive web documentary, with different levels and ‘modes’ of interactivity.
(Gaudenzi, 2012). Similarly, the fields of international development and social change are not only vast but contentiously theorised, with different issues coming under these headings. Whilst I attempt to unpack this diversity and anchor my work in certain definitions, I have only been able to look at two different forms of interactive web documentary that deal with a small range of different topics within the themes of international development and social change. This arguably limits the reach of my research. There are many different variables when dealing with different interactive web documentaries, such as topic, characters, story, length, access, modes of interactivity etc. that may affect the way in which a user will respond and engage. Similarly there are many different types of user, whose responses to any given topic or format can be biased by their own cultural background, experience and understanding (de Jong, 2008; Hall, 1972). Thus my conclusions within this research regarding interactive web documentary and international development and social change cannot be absolute and should be viewed within the confines of my case studies.

Method limitations: survey

There are limitations inherent to the use of the survey method that are worth mention. Due to the limitations in range and number of survey questions, as well as the environment and time respondents had to complete my questionnaires (particularly in the case of the Awra Amba adult audience test group) the quality and depth of the data collected was in some cases low. Unlike in qualitative interviews, survey responses cannot be probed or pursued further. I attempted to address this by asking respondents within the survey to explain or justify their answers, which did yield some more interesting, in depth data. However, not all respondents took the opportunity to do this and thus their input was in some cases limited. It was an attempt to address this that led me to carry out a small number of random, supplementary qualitative, semi-structured interviews via Skype with respondents.

As with any group undertaking a survey, one must also acknowledge the potential presence of a ‘socially desirable response bias’. By this I mean, my test groups may have felt it was socially expected or desirable for them to be positive or negative about interactive web documentaries and/or issues of development and social change and respond according to that perceived social expectation rather than responding honestly about their own opinion (Sjöström & Holst, 2002). For example, there could be a sense of social expectation amongst those in my academic test group to be more critical of the interactive web documentary approach in order to reflect their academic credentials in the area, as opposed
to responding about their own personal reactions/impressions. Similarly, my Norwegian respondents could be said to have a positive cultural bias towards issues of international development and social change as Norway has one of the largest international aid budgets. It is incredibly difficult to avoid the social desirability bias in any form of social research and I therefore acknowledge this as a limitation inherent to my chosen methodology. I did however make attempts to address this potential imbalance by selecting a number of different groups, all of whom may have had different biases – cultural, academic, age etc - so that I could gain a broader view.

**Method limitations: presentation of case study**

It is also important to critically reflect upon the fact that there was a change to the way in which the *Awra Amba* audience testing was able to proceed, which had a knock on affect on my survey and interview data for this case study. As I explained above, *Awra Amba* had not ‘gone live’ at the time of the audience test screening, meaning respondents were not able to interact with it directly themselves on the day, instead they were lead through it by a third party. Due to the time restrictions in place to carry out my research I was unable to postpone the testing until the project was online. The participants of the survey questionnaire for this case study were therefore asked to reflect on what they saw they could do rather than what they in fact did themselves. There are two ways of reflecting upon this. The first, more positive, being that participants were given the ‘ideal user’s’ view of the case study upon which to base their answers to the survey questionnaire– viewing everything available and not being able to skip elements or miss content, as this was controlled by a third party. The second, more problematic, reflection is that participants weren’t given the true experience of interactivity themselves and thus there may be some distance between their responses to the survey questions and interviews and what they might have actually done or thought if they were interacting directly themselves. This was unfortunately an unavoidable limitation of my research project. I attempted to address these limitations through my second case study, as it was ‘live’ and all respondents interacted with it directly and in their own time. Upon reflection, I felt that the fact participants were not able to interact directly with the *Awra Amba* case study was most problematic for the younger school audience, aged 15-18, particularly in terms of their attention being held. Indeed two respondents in this group voiced concern over the fact they were not able to interact with the case study themselves, stating that they felt this impeded their ability to complete the questionnaire and answer some of the questions. During discussion, one of these respondents explained, ‘*As we weren't able to interact ourselves, it didn't feel much*
like an interactive film to me.’ Whilst the majority of respondents claimed this did not impede their impressions and ability to participate in the research, it is important to acknowledge that this was an issue for, albeit it a small number, some respondents. That said, the data collected provided some interesting insights and indeed surprises.

Method limitations: respondent selection

Continuing with limitations related to my audience research participants, I should discuss the fact that those selected to respond to the survey are by no means a ‘representative’ cross section of society. The adult Awra Amba group were part of a screening organised by a film festival called Films From the South, which screens films made by and about the Global South. Therefore in order to be there, one can assume there was an already held interest that motivated their decision to attend, although those interests may have been diverse. I would note here however that the 15-18 year old Awra Amba survey group were slightly different to their older counterparts, in that although they were attending screenings organised by the film festival and their school, they were not necessarily personally motivated to attend, as it was part of a scheduled lesson. These respondents were then perhaps more representative of those outside the development and social change interested group. Respondents for my second case study were selected from students of development and communications masters and undergraduate programmes. I chose to select participants from these groups for a number of reasons. First, I wanted to survey a student group in order to supplement the high school and more general public groups surveyed in the first case study. Second, the diversity of cultural and professional backgrounds of these groups, as they are studying international programmes, was appealing in order to diversify the audience tested. Finally, a significant aspect of my decision to use these groups was based on the practical considerations of access, as I already had established communications channels through which to get in contact. In using this academic group, it must be noted that to be students on these programmes there must be some interest in the general issues of development and social change, which as I explained earlier could bias their responses. Also, these respondents represent what could be identified as an academic elite. As I mentioned earlier, because my survey groups are not selected on a representative basis and are somewhat self-selecting in terms of membership, it is problematic to attempt to extrapolate more general conclusions from the data gathered, outside of the confines of this research.
Furthermore, I should note that a proportion of my respondents were non-native English speakers and were therefore operating in their second language, in answering the survey and in terms of their experience of the interactive web documentaries themselves, as these were in English, with English subtitles. Whilst the English language skills of all participants were incredibly high, this was an issue in terms of some respondents’ understandings of the questions and phrasing in the survey. Whilst I tried to ensure that my questions were clear and didn’t use needlessly technical or colloquial English terminology that might be difficult to understand in a second language, as a native English speaker I was not necessarily able to pre-empt exactly which questions might be problematic. Again, I feel this was more of an issue for the younger Norwegian (15-18 year old) respondents, some of whom struggled to articulate their thoughts in a second language.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS & ANALYSIS

Within this section I shall present and analyse the results of my research. Whilst I surveyed three groups, using two different case studies, I present my findings together, organised under key headings, rather than separating the case studies and groups into different sections. Under each heading I shall, however, attempt to triangulate my survey, qualitative interview and focus group discussion results, drawing comparisons where possible between my different respondent groups and case studies.

The first section, below, *interactivity and engagement*, highlights respondents’ general impressions regarding their engagement through the case studies in the issues of international development and social change. The latter three sections, *active engagement*, *emotional engagement* and *critical engagement*, were uncovered during analysis of respondents’ survey data as three broad modes of engagement and were then pursued within interviews and discussion. Whilst the majority of my data fits under these headings I have also included a section entitled: *Negative effects on engagement*, wherein I analyse the negative reflections of respondents regarding their engagement through the case studies in issues of international development and social change.

### 4.1 Interactivity and engagement

One of the challenges to engagement in issues of international development and social change within the Web 2.0 media environment that I highlighted earlier in this paper is the perceived demand amongst audiences to be entertained rather than simply informed (Mouffe in Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006: 968). The traditional linear documentary format has been accused of being too ‘dry’ or ‘worthy’ in its representation of the often-complex issues of international development and social change, thus causing a drop in audience engagement in these issues (Scott, 2011). Interactive web documentary on the other hand- in blending the trusted ‘discourse of sobriety’ (Nichols, 1991) for which documentary is known with interactive tools that are often associated with entertainment genres - could have the potential for changing the relationship of engagement with these issues.

Within my surveys I first posed a preliminary question that investigated whether the interactive web documentary format as an abstract concept was something that might make
respondents feel more interested in engaging with issues of international development and social change in comparison to a linear format. Data was mixed in response to this general comparative question with 58 respondents out of 96 claiming the ability to interact via clicking, sharing, chatting, navigating virtual environments etc., would make them more interested in engaging with content on issues of international development and social change in comparison to linear. 32 respondents however claimed it would not make a difference, whilst 6 respondents claimed that it would make them feel less interested.

Respondents who did see a positive relationship between interactivity and engagement, appeared to focus on the entertainment value of interacting, with one respondent stating, ‘when I interact I can learn in a fun way and not just watch something for an hour. It’s more interesting that way.’

When these responses were cross-referenced with responses to questions directly related to the specific case studies, respondents appeared to be significantly more positive about the interactive web documentary format and its relationship to their interest and engagement in the issues presented. Indeed, 81% of the schools group and 88% of the adult group respondents claimed the interactive presentation of Awra Amba made them feel more engaged in the issues of international development and social change that it deals with. This discrepancy between responses to these general and case study specific questions could perhaps speak to the argument that interactivity as an abstract concept is not enough to guarantee audience interest - it is the specific ways in which interactivity is employed that determines this. It also speaks to the dangers of generalizing about interactivity and the interactive web documentary – the approaches taken can be diverse, resulting in different experiences for different users and thus different experiences of engagement (Gaudenzi, 2012).

It is worth noting that the comparative element, between interactive web documentary and linear formats, of the first more general line of questioning, could perhaps have negatively affected respondents’ answers. Analysis of data indicates that respondents were often uncomfortable when explicitly asked to make direct comparisons between linear and interactive web documentary in terms of which one was more effective at engaging them. As one respondent put it, ‘I’m not sure you can compare them like that, they are really different and I think both are good in different ways for different things.’ However, respondents often made their own comparisons between the formats within their answers, without prompting. Another issue could perhaps be that there was no direct example for respondents to compare to. If time and resources had allowed I would have carried out a control group with a linear documentary in order to investigate this comparison further. Unfortunately in this study I was unable to organize this with enough time.

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Within focus group style discussion of the *Awra Amba* case study and the explanation of their answers within the survey, respondents in both the schools and the adult groups pointed to interactivity as being key to their engagement in the issues presented. One respondent claimed, ‘*My mind was more active with the interactive experience, it was harder to drift off so it kept me interested*’ whilst others explained:

‘*Being able to do everything yourself, kind of makes you more interested. You decide what you want to do and go through different types of explanations (sic) so you understand the issues more. I think it’s more interesting*.’

Another respondent added,

‘*Because you can be active and click on what ever you want to know, when and in what order you like and explore, you understand better. It is much more interesting.*’

Within the semi-structured interviews, I probed respondents’ claims to feeling more engaged, asking whether respondents were certain it was the interactive format that made them more feel this as opposed to the content itself or the issues that were being presented. All respondents who claimed to feel more engaged point to the interactive format as being the key to their increased engagement. As one *Inside Disaster* respondent explained:

‘*...It was the interactivity for me. The interactivity makes you feel more active and so for me it made me want to carry on being active and look into it more. The linear documentary is very passive, although the documentaries can be great, to me they are pretty passive and don’t build the regular agency so much. They can make you look into things further if it’s quite a shocking or interesting subject but that takes a lot to make you actually go and do it. Of course it depends on the person but for me the interactivity gives you a boost to start to engage more, whatever the issue is.*’

4.2 ‘Active’ engagement

‘*You change from being a passive consumer of information to being and feeling more active.*’

Respondent, adult, *Awra Amba*

A common theme that was identified within respondents’ answers and focus group style discussion was the sense of becoming *active* within the interactive web documentary experience.

Part of what distinguishes interactive web documentary from the traditional documentary format as outlined earlier is the demands that are made of the user for physical and social interaction and participation in the content, which has led to a reconceptualising of the
audience as ‘active users’ who are empowered to act on and through these media texts (Gaudenzi, 2012; Carpentier, 2008). The notion of the active audience is in fact contentiously theorised, with some suggesting audience action could lead to civic participation (Dahlgren, 2007) whilst others are more sceptical about what levels of activity are really achieved, arguing that this ‘activity’ often does not reach beyond the boundaries of the text (Budarick, 2009: 258).

Indeed in the above responses, most respondents who answered positively about interactivity and engagement referred to being active as a key determinate of their engagement. When asked to explain how and why they felt more active, respondents gave a variety of answers, however most were linked in some way to a sense of having both freedom and control.

| Respondent 1: I can learn in my own speed and I can play around with it |
| Respondent 2: It gave me more freedom to explore than a normal film, I was able to choose what I wanted to see and how |
| Respondent 3: It gives me the oppertunity (sic) to see and learn about what I want, when I want to. It also feels more personal when I get to hear stories from different individual persons told by themselves (sic) |
| Respondent 4: When you watch a documentary you get everything in your face. But when it is interactive like this you have to do it your self. You have to read the text stuff your self and you need to be a little motivated before you start |
| Respondent 5: It is more exciting when you get to control (sic) it yourself |
| Respondent 6: Being able to make your own choices increases the curiosity |
| Respondent 7: Watching or reading a normal programme can get boring during some times (sic). When you control everything you can control how much you find out and stick to the things you find interesting. |

From active to action

Arguably one of the primary aims of any form of international development and social change communications is to provoke some kind of response from its audience, to act in some way, be it through joining a campaign, direct activism, behaviour change, voluntary work or most commonly donations.

It is therefore interesting that some respondents pointed to the sense of being an active user as being a catalyst for carrying out action outside of their role within the interactive web documentary, for example finding out more about the issues dealt with, sharing the case study with others or entering into discussion or debate. One respondent who interacted with the Inside Disaster case study explained:
'It’s easier to get active…. I would speak just about me, but I think interactive documentary makes me feel more active than a regular documentary – it made me want to carry on ‘doing something’.'

Another respondent within the Inside Disaster case study group explained:

‘Already being active and having to think about different ways of looking at things and doing things, and thinking about the different interests in humanitarian disaster for example was a good way of encouraging me to find out more, discuss and share information. Whereas maybe when you’ve watched a linear documentary you are like ‘Oh, I’ve watched a documentary about that issue, now I feel good about myself’ and that’s where it ends.’

Describing the kinds of action they intended to take, it appeared that respondents’ activity fell short of the ‘political’, in the sense that it did not appear to be linked to direct activism or contact with political institutions. Rather, their action was more focussed on finding out more about the issues, donating to NGOs and related causes, sharing and discussing content. The same respondent as above stated:

‘I will seek more information and definitely I felt like I wanted to try to get more involved even with certain elements of aid and voluntary work and I felt like I wanted to donate. But first it made me want to look more into it and research more…’

4.3 Emotional engagement

‘I tend to care more if I feel closer’

Respondent, schools, Awra Amba

One of the key elements and indeed hurdles inherent to communications on issues of international development and social change mentioned earlier is the mediation of distance and the establishment of an emotional connection with the ‘distant other’ (Stone, 2002; Silverstone, 2007). Indeed, since the days of Aristotle it has been claimed that proximity has a direct relationship with people’s willingness to help or feel empathy, so that we are more willing to aid or try to understand those to whom we feel ‘close’. ‘Be it geographic, age, character, habits, or familial: you pity those you know’ (Kennedy, 2009). It was therefore intriguing that 60 out of 81 respondents claimed that a unique aspect of the Awra Amba case study was the fact they could ‘feel closer to the people in Awra Amba’ through their experience of the virtual environment. A number of respondents in explanation of this feeling claimed, ‘It feels like you’re there’ and ‘it makes the world smaller’.

Mediating distance
Respondents who interacted with the *Inside Disaster* case study also spoke of the mediation of distance as being a key aspect of the interactive web documentary that impacted their engagement with the issues of international development and social change that were dealt with, ‘It helps one feel closer to victims and understand the story from different angles.’

During focus group style discussion of the *Awra Amba* case study respondents who claimed to have felt closer were asked to explain why feeling like they were there or closer to the subjects of the case studies was valuable to them. One respondent explained, ‘by feeling like you are there you get a more personal relationship to the issues.’ Their colleague expanded upon this by stating:

‘Yeh, it makes it more personal and I tend to care more if I feel closer and can see individuals instead of just thinking about them as a massive group that is far away. When I can interact like this, I become more aware of what I see and I get to know the persons (sic) better. It makes me feel more interested because I feel closer.’

Another respondent made a comparison to linear documentary in their explanation of why they valued ‘feeling closer’ to the subjects of *Awra Amba*:

‘For getting a more personal understanding of the issues, watching a film can’t be compared to interacting with the story by yourself. Interacting is way better, you feel so much closer and so you feel more connected to the people and the issues that affect their lives.’

One of the perceived risks of using interactive web documentary and immersive environments to communicate issues of international development and social change is that users may mistakenly believe they have a complete understanding of the environment they are able to explore, when in actual fact they remain distant observers (Smith, 2011; Scott, forthcoming). What is interesting in the *Awra Amba* groups however is that 93% of respondents expressed a desire to ‘find out more about the community’ after being introduced to the case study. Indeed respondents’ qualitative responses in this regard revealed a sense of having had an introduction to, rather than a full experience of, the community and the issues that affect their lives through the virtual environment. One respondent explained:

‘I want to know more...I feel close to these people now even though they are far away, I feel like I know a bit more about their lives than normal so it makes me want to find out even more. I’m interested now so I want to know more.’

Another respondent from the schools survey group revealed:

‘Now that I have seen Awra Amba and feel like I have been able to explore it a bit, I want to see it properly, for real. It was very different to how I imagined a village in Ethiopia but...’
I still don’t know the whole of it. That makes me want to go there for real and see it with my own eyes.’

These responses suggest that respondents, despite feeling a closing of distance through the interactive web documentary, remained aware of the mediating role of the format, seeing it as a way of getting an introductory view of another part of the world, rather than buying into any false promise of it being a first hand experience. This was explained well by one of the Inside Disaster respondents within their qualitative interview:

‘I think documentary in general lets you see other things that you might not otherwise see or experience and interactive documentary lets you see and experience those things in a different, maybe more ‘real’ way. As long as you understand what you ‘experience’ isn’t the be all, end all, that there are certain things you just can’t know from media, it’s a really great way of introducing you to ideas and issues that you never thought about before.’

Responsibility

Respondents within the Awra Amba and Inside Disaster case study groups also both identified a link between the mediation of distance and an increased sense of responsibility. An Awra Amba respondent explained in their survey response, ‘You feel more responsible when you have gotten so close to the people’

One of the Inside Disaster respondents spoke in more depth within their qualitative interview on this aspect of their engagement – pointing to the immersive nature of the Inside Disaster case study as being key to invoking a sense of responsibility and emotional connection that could be read as linked to a cosmopolitan or transnational idea of the imagined global citizenry (Nash, 2008: 168; Anderson, 1996; Kyriakidou, 2009) and a broader concept of engagement ‘with the world’ through participation.

‘It gives you a sense of satisfaction to be involved and the fact that you are deliberately made to participate. It makes you be more responsible or think more responsibly because you are connected to the situation – you are seeing how different actions you choose has an effect on the outcome of the situation in Haiti. You know, everyone likes that feeling of being included in something, appreciated and involved so I think that is what this feeds into….So you feel you are a global citizen in this way, it makes you connect and it makes you a bit more responsible about things that happen globally. It makes you feel closer to the situation and so it is harder to ignore. It diminishes the distance of ‘Oh, over there something has happened’, no, no, no, I’m here and I’m going through this process and I’m experiencing it in my way. So it diminishes the distance that is often described when talking about how we view these things.’

This response could be read to suggest that this immersive experience could for some overcome the perceived ‘anaesthetising’ effect of the television or in this case computer
screen that is outlined by Chouliaraki (2006:25) in terms of traditional documentary, allowing the ‘distant other’ to be conceived of in more emotionally connected terms.

### 4.4 Critical engagement

*‘It makes you think more of the other ways of doing things and the critical options.’*

Respondent, *Inside Disaster*

Respondents across both case studies and all groups identified a sense of critical engagement with the issues of international development and social change within their interactive experience, although it was the *Inside Disaster* case study groups that spoke in most detail about this aspect of their engagement.

#### Becoming a critical thinker

Ten out of fifteen *Inside Disaster* respondents directly referred to the notion of criticism or thinking critically in their survey responses as being a positive aspect of their engagement with the issues of humanitarian disaster relief that were dealt with within the case study. This was expanded upon in qualitative interviews, where one respondent stated,

*‘Thinking about what I would actually do in that situation was helpful. And I suppose the fact it’s something that it forces you to think about…if you were the typical person just passively watching a documentary, you wouldn’t necessarily think critically that much. *Inside Disaster* forces you to think critically.’*

Here the aspect of immersion within the *Inside Disaster* case study is identified as important to encouraging or in the respondent’s words, forcing, users to become critical thinkers – arguably an important part of understanding the often complex socio-political issues of international development and social change.

One respondent made the comparison between linear documentary and the interactive web documentary in their description of this critical element,

*‘I think definitely, in linear documentary, you don’t have to think necessarily, you just have to receive and then it is up to you whether you think about the issues in more depth. Whereas with *Inside Disaster*, you definitely have to put a little more effort in, you have to become a form of critical thinker in order to navigate the different paths so that is a benefit right there.’*

#### Discussion and dialogue

A key aspect of this sense of critical engagement that was discussed by respondents within the *Awra Amba* case study group was linked to the opportunities available for discussion or
dialogue, not only with other users but with the subjects of the documentary itself. The opportunity for discussion and debate could be said to make steps towards achieving the types of civic engagement that traditional documentary on issues of international development and social change issues has often strived for – by harnessing the power of the Internet to create ‘an immediate dialogue and exchange with and between a global audience via Web 2.0 platforms’ (O’Flynn, 2012)

When asked whether the Awra Amba case study made respondents feel more inclined to discuss the issues dealt with, all respondents said that they felt interactivity led to more opportunities for discussion. During the focus group style discussion one respondent explained: ‘Because you are already online you can talk to other people to get their opinion, it’s harder to do that with a normal film or documentary. Discussing and debating is a good way to think about the things you are seeing.’

78% of the schools respondents and 98% of the adult respondents claimed they would like to have the opportunity to engage with the Awra Amba community via the discussion platform that is part of the Awra Amba project. Respondents from both groups were enthusiastic about the potential for discussion with the people they saw in the Awra Amba case study. One respondent stated: ‘It would be really good to be able to ask questions and speak to the people we have seen about what we have learned. You can’t do that normally. That would be really cool and make the world feel smaller.’

Another respondent reiterated:

‘If I can discuss with them and with others I can hear more about their opinions on the issues as well. I can understand better the problems and why they live like they do. That for me would be the main reward for interacting, getting to have a debate or discussion’

Respondents within the Inside Disaster group also brought up the opportunity to discuss or debate what they had seen as being a desirable aspect of the interactive experience. As one respondent put it:

‘That’s like the ultimate interaction, for people to ask a question and actually get an answer. I think that could be the main area where the potential [of interactive documentary] lies – in helping you have conversations with the people you are watching and who live so far away.’

Another respondent argued:
'One of the big problems with normal documentary is you can’t be involved, you have to sit and watch and then you would have to get on a plane and go somewhere if you wanted to ask them, ‘why did you do this or what is it like to live like that’. Who is actually able to do that really? The interactive ones mean almost anyone can ask those questions and truly get to grips with the different perspectives and issues from a person’s own point of view who is living it. That’s amazing. If you get a response and can discuss with the other side of the camera, that’s amazing.’

Critical thinking, dialogue and the public sphere

Nick Couldry argues that by increasing the numbers of people who can potentially contribute to discussions of socio-political issues, such as those in the two case studies, this in turn could lead to more people having access ‘to the public sphere, enabling, in principle, quite a radical revision of both of Habermas’ accounts (the earlier pessimistic and the later, more optimistic accounts) of the public sphere’ (Habermas, 1989, 1996 in Couldry, 2008: 22). Indeed, in providing a ‘virtual space’ online, the interactive web documentary, could be said to offer an arena where ‘physically dispersed citizens…deliberate amongst themselves, so enhancing public connection within and across communities’ (Dahlgren, 2003).

This idea could perhaps be read into the above data regarding debate and discussion. However it was more directly alluded to by one respondent who made reference to something akin to the public sphere when they spoke of the benefits of being able to discuss and debate the issues they experienced within the interactive web documentary.

‘Creating a space where you can directly pose questions and debate and interact, without the mediation of a camera – so posing questions and getting answers somehow would be where interactive documentary has an opportunity to improve the way audiences engage with complex issues of development and social change.’

Another respondent made the link between dialogue with the Awra Amba community and the ability to gain multiple perspectives, using these to critique and debate what is shown:

‘Being able to speak to the people involved would be awesome. Because it’s one thing to see a documentary with a filmmaker’s idea of how things are, picking some images etc. But you can check the truth when you are speaking to people and also see their impressions of the situation, not just listening to what one person thinks about the situation of others but actually being able to hear people’s perspectives related to their situation. That would be great.’

Multiple perspectives

The act of simulation through immersion that is key to many interactive web documentaries has been said to present a powerful means of experiencing ‘multiple realities that belong to
parts of society that might not always be in dialogue with each other’ (Gaudenzi, 2012: 246).

When asked to identify qualities within the Awra Amba case study that were particularly useful to their understanding and engagement with the issues of international development and social that were dealt with, 68 respondents claimed that by presenting issues in different ‘huts’ that contained different media content around each issue, the issues were easier to understand and different perspectives were made available.

Indeed, 83% of respondents identified being able to get ‘different points of view’ as a key quality of the Awra Amba case study.

One respondent explained:
‘often you have to learn the whole topic to understand different facts and you can’t really do that with a normal film, it would be so long. But with Awra Amba it gives you them in different ways so that in the end you can see more’.

Similarly, a common feature of the Inside Disaster experience identified by respondents was the presentation of multiple perspectives on issues of humanitarian disaster, relief and aid. 14 out of 15 respondents claimed that the multiple perspectives that could be found in Inside Disaster made the complexities of humanitarian relief ‘easier’ to understand than via a linear approach, whilst 13 respondents claimed Inside Disaster made these issues ‘clearer’. However, one respondent who stated that the complexities were easier to understand stated that the format was at the same time ‘less clear’ than a linear approach due to the ‘jumping back and forth’ of the interactive structure.

One respondent described how this feature was key to allowing the complexities of these issues to be communicated more clearly:
‘Being presented with alternative options and things like that was a really good way of allowing me to understand the complexities of the situation, better than if I was just seeing one view or route. You know, that is something that a traditional documentary wouldn’t offer’

Another respondent spoke of getting a bigger picture view through different perspectives which in turn was positively connected to their interest in the subject:
‘It’s interesting to be able to navigate through different kind of experiences because normally what you see is just one slice of the situation but this way, you get to see more
views of the same things. So it’s interesting to see more than just….to see the broader picture rather than just one idea.’

These positive reflections on the multiple perspectives afforded by the interactive format serve to support the hopes of academics such as Denis Kennedy who have pointed to Internet supported communications as having the potential to provide multidimensional portrayals of development issues (Kennedy, 2009).

4.5 Negative effects upon engagement

There are naturally some reservations, particularly within the field of development studies, over the use of interactive web documentary to communicate the complex and politically laden issues of international development and social change. It is thus important to analyse the negative effects upon engagement that were identified by respondents across both case studies.

High expectations of interactivity

Whilst the sense of being active was connected to a positive feeling of engagement for the majority of respondents, a small number pointed to the case studies restricting their opportunities for action, which in turn frustrated their engagement.

A respondent to the Inside Disaster survey claimed:

‘I guess Inside Disaster made me feel a bit restricted in that there were defined routes and paths and options I could take and normally on the Internet I am used to being able to explore infinite options.’

This point speaks to the fact that whilst the interactive web documentary might employ the Web 2.0 interactive tools that are said to transform audiences into active users, this comes with an inherent level of expectation for what that experience will allow audiences to do. As Galloway et al (2007) explain, ‘Part of the problem with interactive television and film is that audience expectations are high. The very notion…raises the bar, creating in the viewer the sense that they will be presented with televisual or filmic quality images over which they will have full and complete freedom of control…’ (Galloway, McAlpine & Harris, 2007: 330). When these expectations are not met, audiences can become disillusioned and even frustrated with the content.
Non-linearity and disruption

One of the negative issues identified by a small number (5) of the Awra Amba respondents was in fact linked to the non-linear approach taken to the presentation of the content. One adult respondent explained, ‘It is easier to concentrate and get into the themes, emotionally, in a conventional movie without interruption.’ For this respondent the interruption that is experienced through consuming content in a non-linear way actually served to emotionally disconnect them from the issues that were dealt with.

One respondent from the schools survey group, who claimed the interactive web documentary format would make them less interested in engaging with issues of international development and social change explained:

‘I enjoy more to just view a movie and afterwards think of what I learned and what I didn’t understand (sic)...Sometimes it can be more comforting by not having to interact with the documentary, instead you can just see a film and do nothing but listen and watch.’ This response implies that the demand for direct participation with the interactive web documentary content can in fact present a barrier to engagement as for some it could be too much effort. Indeed audiences are used, when it comes to documentary, to fulfilling a more passive, interpretative role (Gaudenzi, 2012) and for some the demand for participation could be too disruptive to this established audience logic (Ibid).

Another negative issue highlighted by a schools group Awra Amba respondent was the issue of time. This respondent argued ‘exploring is too time consuming’ claiming that this would make them less inclined to engage with the issues presented, ‘I don’t have time, if I want to sit and watch a film I will make time because I can relax, this feels like way more work.’

Access

One of the respondents within the adult Awra Amba group made an interesting point that speaks to the issue of Internet access. The 78 year old respondent stated, ‘This doesn’t appeal to me at all because I don’t use the Internet.’ Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that some will not have the opportunity to engage at all if they do not have access to the Internet. Whilst the numbers of those who have Internet access are rising all the time, the fact remains that just 35.2% of the world population has access (Internet World Stats,
and indeed it is predominantly elites that engage and interact within the online media sphere (Dahlgren, 2007). Thus the online nature of the interactive web documentary as well as the demands for, albeit quite basic, online skills could be said to alienate some users, which in turn problematizes the impression that the format provides an open access platform for international debate. Whilst the fact that it is presented online does significantly increase the numbers of people who can access it, in comparison to a film that is offline for example, as well as the geographical reach of the content, there are important audiences, including those living in rural Ethiopia and Haiti for example (the locations of the two case studies) who will not necessarily have the internet access or indeed the language or literacy levels to become involved in any form of discussion or debate. The Awra Amba project attempts to overcome this by providing translation into multiple languages but the fact still remains that whilst the reach of this content is certainly wide, the political and social constraints of the offline world still restrict access for some (Pieterse, 2009).

The dangers of simulation and play

The potential for entering into uncomfortable relations of power, where the empowered user may gain the sense that they understand the life and experience of the ‘distant other’ that is represented, by ‘playing’ within a fictional, albeit based on fact, virtual environment has been highlighted earlier as a danger inherent to simulation and play in the context of international development and social change. Indeed in the virtual environment the user has the freedom to leave at any moment – a luxury that is not afforded to those whose lived experience the interactive web documentary is supposed to represent (Chouliaraki 2006: 25; Fenyoe, 2010 in Smith, 2011: 7). This environment whilst seemingly more ‘real’ than other forms of mediation is still mediated and so fails to communicate certain elements of reality, such as ‘the smell that comes from lack of sanitation or the true reality of having to walk miles to get any water’ (Watkins, 2010).

Whilst the majority of respondents identified the immersive, gaming element of the Inside Disaster case study as having a positive affect upon their engagement, by encouraging critical thinking and exposing multiple perspectives, one Inside Disaster respondent viewed it more negatively, arguably speaking to the above criticism. They claimed that the experience of immersion in fact made them feel more distant explaining:

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6 See [http://www.internetworldstats.com/list2.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/list2.htm)
‘I think I still felt, even though there’s this interactive component, with people talking to you on the screen what that actually did was it made it feel even more distant...because I realise I’m not there, I’m not actually a journalist or a survivor or an aid worker and so I can’t really totally appreciate the whole experience as it would be. I still very much feel like an outsider and I think it was maybe even more pronounced through the fact that it was trying to bring me in. You know, through the act of pretending.’

This response also touches on the argument that in the employment of the fictional tools and ‘visual language’ commonly associated with video games (Watkins, 2010) interactive web documentaries like *Inside Disaster* could in fact serve to fictionalise the lives and experiences of those being observed and at worst perhaps ‘fetishize suffering or exoticise the other’ (Kennedy, 2009) rather than encouraging engagement in the issues portrayed.

Another of the perceived dangers of using ‘play’ or immersion to engage audiences in the politically complex issues of international development and social change is that the entertainment element of interactive web documentary could end up superseding the documentary value of the content (Raessens, 2007: 223), oversimplifying these issues. The same respondent independently highlighted this drawback explaining, ‘The gaming nature displays it as though there is always going to be a "right" or "wrong" choice, until you "win." That feels oversimplified to me’

Interestingly, this respondent took a somewhat more reflexive view of these responses later in their qualitative interview, reflecting upon the academic literature they had been studying and the influence this might have had upon their initial response:

‘I don’t know, maybe I was too critical because I’m studying these issues so I’m aware of that stuff....I think maybe I’m coming at it from that critical academic angle. Maybe if I hadn’t studied that stuff I wouldn’t be so aware of the politics of distance and would feel closer...’
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Within this research, I set out to uncover the ways in which interactive web documentary might affect engagement with issues of international development and social change, through surveys, interviews and group discussion based on two case studies. The implicit assumption at the beginning of this research was that the interactive format might present new and potentially interesting opportunities for engaging audiences in these issues, which are often viewed as ‘boring’ or ‘difficult’. Blending aspects of entertainment, through interactive tech, with the authority of the documentary format; making use of immersive technology to allow audiences to have virtual ‘experiences’ and using the networked Web 2.0 to enable engagement ‘with the world’ through discussion and debate.

I identified three modes of engagement in issues of international development and social change that were activated amongst respondents through the case studies used in this research, these were: active, emotional and critical engagement. Within these modes, different qualities of interactive web documentary were also identified and linked back to engagement. The mediation of distance, through immersion, was identified as being key to allowing respondents to establish closer emotional connections with the otherwise distant characters and issues that were dealt with in the respective case studies. This emotional connection was in turn linked to a perceived sense of cosmopolitan responsibility and connection (Nash, 2008; Kyriakidou, 2009) whereby audiences claimed to ‘care more’ and ‘feel closer’ to the issues and people portrayed than they would otherwise.

‘Being active’ within the interactive web documentary was also connected to an increased willingness to act on the issues of development and social change that were dealt with, although the level and nature of that action appeared to be restricted to sharing and ‘finding out more’. This could on the one hand be due to other options for action, such as signing petitions etc., not being explicitly presented in these case study examples or on the other hand could be said to reinforce Evgeny Morozov’s critique of online activism, as being limited and often politically ineffectual (Morozov, 2013).

The promotion of critical thinking, through discussion and debate and the representation of multiple perspectives, was similarly uncovered as being a valued element of the interactive web documentary format, allowing respondents to engage with ‘the bigger picture’ and gain a ‘clearer’ understanding of the issues of international development and
social change that were dealt with. The opportunity afforded to participate in more
traditional forms of communication on a global scale, to discuss, to debate and to deliberate
across national borders and with ‘distant others’ was also identified by the majority of
respondents as being the most valuable aspect of engagement afforded by the format – even
being referred to as ‘the ultimate interaction’. The expression of a willingness or desire to
engage in debate and discussion on issues of international development and social change
could be said to indicate a potential role for the format in facilitating a form of
Habermasian online public sphere where socio-political issues are negotiated and contested
(Couldry, 2008). However, my research did not allow me to directly monitor research
participants and thus I am unable to assess whether genuine discussion and debate would
occur in this space. Therefore I am only able to point to a potential opportunity and
enthusiasm amongst my respondents for this form of global civic engagement ‘with the
world’.

These findings indicate that the interactive web documentary, through the various Web 2.0
and interactive characteristics I outlined earlier in this paper, could enable audiences to
enjoy the active, emotional and critical modes of engagement in issues of international
development and social change, which have arguably proven to be more difficult to achieve
through other mediums.

That said there are a number of limitations and considerations that emerged when looking
at interactive web documentary in the context of issues of international development and
social change. Access, the willingness to interact in the first place, ethical and political
issues connected to the processes of simulation and play – such as power asymmetries,
observer /observed relations and trivialisation - are all issues that need to be taken seriously
and be carefully considered in approaches to interactive web documentary.

As a relatively under-theorised field, there are a large number of different avenues that
could be pursued in future research. Each of the three modes of engagement identified
within this paper could indeed be researched independently and in significantly more depth,
particularly emotional engagement and the notion of cosmopolitan responsibility for
example. Further research could also be carried out on how different audience
demographics respond and engage to interactive web documentary in the context of issues
of international development and social change. Whilst I surveyed different groups, my
samples were not large enough to draw general conclusions. What was interesting however
was that the results from what I had assumed would be the tech-savvy, Web 2.0 native group – the 15-18 year old school students- indicated a much more critical view of the format than I had anticipated. It would therefore be extremely interesting to investigate youth engagement with issues of international development and social change through the interactive web documentary format for example. There is further important aspect of the interactive web documentary’s use in the representation of issues of international development and social change that I would have liked to have had the opportunity to explore but was unable to due to time and resources. That is the effect upon the subjects of the interactive web documentary. Future research could investigate how they might benefit from engagement by ‘viewers’ through interactive web documentary, if at all? Are they able to genuinely participate in discussion and debate and thus could they have an independent voice and role in the so-called online public sphere through the interactive web documentary? Or is this a false promise that relies on the assumption of access and literacy and ignores the socio-economic reality. This would be a particularly interesting investigation to make into the *Awra Amba* discussion platform once it is launched, to assess the levels and methods of involvement for the community and the effect this has upon them.
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APPENDICES AND ENDNOTES

Appendix A: Copies of surveys

Afra Amba schools survey

Gender *

Female
Male

Age *

Nationality *

Do you ever watch documentaries, films or television programmes about international development and social change? *

Very often (once a week)
Often (more than once a month but less than once a week)
Sometimes
Rarely (maybe once a year)
Never

What might encourage you to watch a documentary, film or programme about the Global South (places like Africa, Asia and Latin America)? *

If the below statements don't explain your view please tell us what else might encourage you to watch this sort of thing by writing in the box marked 'Other'

If it is a country I am already interested in
If it is about an issue I am already interested in
If it allows me to learn more about different people and places
If it is like a video game and allows me to press buttons and click on things to get more information
If my friends are talking about it on Facebook or Twitter or at school
If it is something different, like an interactive documentary, that I have never seen before
Other:

Had you ever heard of an 'interactive documentary' before today? *

Yes
No

If you answered yes to question 3, in your own words describe what you think an interactive documentary is.
By this we mean what does the term mean to you - there is no right or wrong answer!

Have you ever watched a documentary that is interactive before? *

This can be any form of online or offline documentary where you are able to interact by clicking buttons, selecting different options to follow the story etc

Yes
No
If you answered yes to question 5, how did you feel about the experience of viewing an interactive documentary?
If none of the options below fits how you felt, please explain in your own words in the box marked 'Other'
- It gave me more freedom to explore than a normal film
- I was able to choose what I wanted to see and how
- I had more power over what I watched
- I didn't feel any different to when I watched a normal film
- I could learn through interacting
Other:

Which of the following statements are true of how you think the Awra Amba experience is different to a normal film? *
You can select as many as you like and add other ideas in the box marked 'Other'
- I can feel closer to the people in Awra Amba by experiencing the virtual environment
- I have the chance to see how life is for the people in Awra Amba
- I am able to learn about different issues through interacting
- I can hear different points of view on issues
- It gives me the chance to discuss different issues
- I have the option to follow the story in my own way
- I have the chance to explore
- It gives me the chance to understand complicated issues more easily/clearly
- It was the same as any documentary
Other:

Is being able to interact and ‘do something’ (discuss issues, independently follow a story) something that would make you more interested in watching/participating in a particular programme? Why? *
Please explain why in the box marked 'Other'
- Yes
- No
- Other:

How much more/less interesting would a documentary with options for interactivity (eg. discussion with those in the documentary and others who are watching, ability to click on different things and control the path of the story) be to you than a documentary dealing with the same subject that doesn't allow you to do these things? *

- Much more
- Slightly more
- Neutral
- Less

Is being able to interact and ‘do something’ (discuss issues, follow a story in your own way) something that would make you feel more interested in an issue that you usually don't think about, for example an issue affecting people in Africa, in comparison to reading or watching a normal programme on the same topic? Explain why *
Please explain your answer in the box below marked 'Other'
- Yes
No
Other:

Please select any of the following statements/words that are closest to your experience of either Awra Amba or interactive documentary in general? *
You can select as many as you like and add more ideas in the box below marked 'Other'
Participation
Engaging
Communication
Debate
Independence
Distance
Game
Working together
Better understanding
Eye-opening
Different points of view
Empowering
Explore
Learn through interacting
Different stories
Other:

Before being introduced to the Awra Amba Experience which of the following issues and how they affect people in Africa did you know about?

Health
Education
Charity
Elderly care
Democracy
Marriage & Babies
Faith & Peace
Equality
Entrepreneurship
Sustainability
I didn't know about any of these things

After seeing the Awra Amba Experience which of the following issues and how they affect people in Africa do you feel you have learned more about?

Health
Education
Charity
Elderly care
Democracy
Marriage & Babies
Faith & Peace
Equality
Entrepreneurship
Sustainability
I don't feel I have learnt about any of these things
Do you feel that being able to interact with the story of Awra Amba would hold your attention better and make you feel more interested in the issues it deals with than watching a 1 hr linear documentary on the same thing? Explain why below *
By linear documentary we mean a documentary where you cannot interact or change the path of the story in any way. Please explain your answer in the box marked 'Other' below.

Yes
No
Other:

After being introduced to the Awra Amba Experience, do you want to find out more about the project? *
Please explain your answer in the box marked 'Other' below.

Yes
No
Other:

After being introduced to the Awra Amba Experience, do you want to find out more about the issues of international and social change dealt with by the interactive web doc? *
Please explain your answer in the box marked 'Other' below.

Yes
No
Other:

Do you think you would take up the opportunity to ask questions and speak to the Awra Amba community via an online discussion platform? *
Please explain your answer in the box marked 'Other' below.

Yes
No
Other:

After being introduced to the Awra Amba Experience, which of the following statements are closest to how you feel? *
You can choose as many as you like and if your thoughts aren't reflected here then please add your own in the box marked 'Other' below.

I want to know more about Awra Amba
I want to hear more about what the Awra Amba community thinks
I want to learn about the history of Awra Amba
I want to know why the people of Awra Amba choose to live like they do
I want to discuss the issues in the films with other people
I want to tell other people about Awra Amba
I want to understand more about how other people in other countries live
I want to learn more about different issues affecting people in places like Africa, Asia and Latin America
I want to know more about interactive documentaries
I want to find out about other interactive documentaries
I want to watch more interactive documentaries about other subjects
I learned more than I thought I would
I was LESS interested than I would be watching a normal film on the same subject
I was MORE interested than I would be watching a normal film on the same subject

Other:

Which of the following words/statements fits how you would feel about watching a 1 hr linear documentary about an issue affecting people in the Global South (places like Africa, Asia and Latin America)? *

Linear documentary means a documentary where you cannot interact and the story follows a set path. Please feel free to add your own thoughts in the box below marked 'Other'.

- Difficult to watch
- Interesting
- It depends on the issue and country and if I'm interested in it already
- Limited points of view
- Engaging
- Boring
- Charity appeal
- Other:

Which of the following words/statements fits how you would feel about watching an interactive documentary about an issue affecting people in the Global South (places like Africa, Asia and Latin America)? *

Please add your own thoughts in the box below marked 'Other'

- Difficult to watch
- Intriguing
- Interesting
- It depends on the issue and country and if I'm interested in it already
- Multiple points of view
- Engaging
- Boring

Awra Amba adult audience survey

Email
Optional

Gender *

Female
Male

Age *

Nationality *

Do you ever watch documentaries, films or television programmes about people and places in the Global South (places like Africa, Asia or Latin America)? *

- Very often (once a week)
- Often (more than once a month but less than once a week)
Sometimes (when it is about something or somewhere I am already
interested in)
Rarely (maybe once a year)
Never

What might encourage you to watch a documentary, film or programme about the
Global South (places like Africa, Asia and Latin America)? *
If the below statements don't explain your view please tell us what else might
encourage you to watch this sort of thing by writing in the box marked 'Other'
If it is a country I am already interested in
If it is about an issue I am already interested in
If it allows me to learn more about different people and places
If it is like a video game and allows me to press buttons and click on things
to get more information
If my peers/colleagues are talking about it on social media
If it is something different, like an interactive documentary, that I have
never seen before
If I hear about it through work
Other:

Had you ever heard of an 'interactive documentary' before today? *

Yes
No

If you answered yes to question 3, in your own words describe what you think an
interactive documentary is.
By this we mean what does the term mean to you - there is no right or wrong answer!

Have you ever watched a documentary that is interactive before? *
This can be any form of online or offline documentary where you are able to interact by
clicking buttons, selecting different options to follow the story etc

Yes
No

If you answered yes to question 5, how did you feel about the experience of viewing
an interactive documentary?

If none of the options below fits how you felt, please explain in your own words in the
box marked 'Other'
It gave me more freedom to explore than a normal film
I was able to choose what I wanted to see and how
I had more power over what I watched
I didn't feel any different to when I watched a normal film
I could learn through interacting
Other:

Which of the following statements are true of how you think the Awra Amba
experience is different to a normal film? *
You can select as many as you like and add other ideas in the box marked 'Other'!
I can feel closer to the people in Awra Amba because I can follow their
individual story
I have the chance to see how life is for the people in Awra Amba
I am able to learn about different issues through interacting
I can hear different points of view on issues
It gives me the chance to discuss different issues
I have the option to follow the story in my own way
I have the chance to explore
It gives me the chance to understand complicated issues more easily/clearly
It was the same as any documentary
Other:

Is being able to interact and ‘do something’ (discuss issues, independently follow a story) something that would make you more interested in watching/participating in a particular programme? Why? *
Please explain why in the box marked 'Other'
  Yes
  No
  Other:

How much more/less interesting would a documentary with options for interactivity (eg. discussion with those in the documentary and others who are watching, ability to click on different things and control the path of the story) be to you than a documentary dealing with the same subject that doesn't allow you to do these things? *
  Much more
  Slightly more
  Neutral
  Less

Is being able to interact and ‘do something’ (discuss issues, follow a story in your own way) something that would make you feel more interested in an issue that you usually don't think about, for example an issue affecting people in Africa, in comparison to reading or watching a normal programme on the same topic?
Explain why *
Please explain your answer in the box below marked 'Other'
  Yes
  No
  Other:

Please select any of the following statements/words that are closest to your experience of either Awra Amba or interactive documentary in general? *
You can select as many as you like and add more ideas in the box below marked 'Other'
  Participation
  Engaging
  Communication
  Debate
  Independence
  Distance
  Game
  Working together
  Better understanding
  Eye-opening
  Different points of view
Empowering
Explore
Learn through interacting
Different stories
Other:

Before being introduced to the Awra Amba Experience which of the following issues and how they affect people in Africa did you know about?

Health
Education
Charity
Elderly care
Democracy
Marriage & Babies
Faith & Peace
Equality
Entrepreneurship
Sustainability
I didn't know about any of these things

After seeing the Awra Amba Experience which of the following issues and how they affect people in Africa do you feel you have learned more about?

Health
Education
Charity
Elderly care
Democracy
Marriage & Babies
Faith & Peace
Equality
Entrepreneurship
Sustainability
I don't feel I have learnt about any of these things

Do you feel that being able to interact with the story of Awra Amba would hold your attention better and make you feel more interested in the issues it deals with than watching a 1 hr linear documentary on the same thing? Explain why below *

By linear documentary we mean a documentary where you cannot interact or change the path of the story in any way. Please explain your answer in the box marked 'Other' below.

Yes
No
Other:

After being introduced to the Awra Amba Experience, do you want to find out more about the project? *
Please explain your answer in the box marked 'Other' below.

Yes
No
After being introduced to the Awra Amba Experience, do you want to find out more about the issues of international and social change dealt with by the interactive web doc? *
Please explain your answer in the box marked 'Other' below.
Yes
No
Other:

Do you think you would take up the opportunity to ask questions and speak to the Awra Amba community via an online discussion platform? *
Please explain your answer in the box marked 'Other' below.
Yes
No
Other:

After being introduced to the Awra Amba Experience, which of the following statements are closest to how you feel? *
You can choose as many as you like and if your thoughts aren't reflected here then please add your own in the box marked 'Other' below.
I want to know more about Awra Amba
I want to hear more about what the Awra Amba community thinks
I want to learn about the history of Awra Amba
I want to know why the people of Awra Amba choose to live like they do
I want to discuss the issues in the films with other people
I want to tell other people about Awra Amba
I want to understand more about how other people in other countries live
I want to learn more about different issues affecting people in places like Africa, Asia and Latin America
I want to know more about interactive documentaries
I want to find out about other interactive documentaries
I want to watch more interactive documentaries about other subjects
I learned more than I thought I would
I was LESS interested than I would be watching a normal film on the same subject
I was MORE interested than I would be watching a normal film on the same subject
Other:

Which of the following words/statements fits how you would feel about watching a 1 hr linear documentary about an issue affecting people in the Global South (places like Africa, Asia and Latin America)? *
Linear documentary means a documentary where you cannot interact and the story follows a set path
Difficult to watch
Interesting
It depends on the issue and country and if I'm interested in it already
Limited points of view
Engaging
Boring
Charity appeal
Which of the following words/statements fits how you would feel about watching an interactive documentary about an issue affecting people in the Global South (places like Africa, Asia and Latin America)? *

- Difficult to watch
- Intriguing
- Interesting
- It depends on the issue and country and if I'm interested in it already
- Multiple points of view
- Engaging
- Boring
- Other:

Inside Disaster survey

Email
Optional

Age

Occupation

Nationality

Name
Optional

Do you ever watch documentaries, films or television programmes about development or social change? *

- Very often (once a week)
- Often (more than once a month but less than once a week)
- Sometimes (when it is about something or somewhere I am already interested in)
- Rarely (maybe once a year)
- Never
- Other:

What might encourage you to watch a documentary, film or programme about development or social change? *

If the below statements don't reflect your view, please explain what else might encourage you to watch this sort of thing by writing in the box marked 'Other'

- If it is about a country or place I am already interested in
- If it is about an issue I am already interested in
- If it allows me to learn more about different people and places
- If it is interactive and allows me to click, share and explore
- If my peers/colleagues are talking about it
If it is something different or innovative, like an interactive documentary, that I have never seen before
If I hear about it through work/university
Other:

Had you ever heard of an 'interactive documentary' before today? *

Yes
No

If you answered yes to the previous question, in your own words describe what you think an interactive documentary is?
By this I mean what does the term mean to you - there is no right or wrong answer!

How long in total did you spend interacting with Inside Disaster? *
Please be honest!
Less than 2 minutes
2 - 5 mins
5 - 10 mins
10 - 15 mins
15 - 20 mins
20 - 30 mins
30 - 1 hr
1 hr +

Please describe the most positive and negative aspects of your experience interacting with Inside Disaster? *
Try not to focus purely on specifics about the features of the site and try to think about how you felt being able to interact. Did it improve your experience and understanding or hinder it? Do you feel you were more interested in the content because of the nature of the format or was it too much work? etc.

Which of the following statements are true of how you think the experience of interacting with Inside Disaster is different to a 'traditional' linear documentary? *
You can select as many as you like and please feel free to add other ideas in the box marked 'Other'
I felt closer to the people and places featured because I can explore, see and hear their world
I had the chance to see multiple perspectives on the same issue through the different stories and media
I was able to learn about different issues through interacting (clicking, sharing, discussion)
I could hear different points of view
I was in control and can follow the story in my own way
I had the chance to explore
It broke down complex issues, allowing the audience to understand them more easily/clearly
There was more information available, through different media
There were more opportunities to take action on the issues dealt with by following links and sharing the story
I feel more active interacting with Inside Disaster and am more likely to
want to 'do something' related to the issues I've seen
   It was the same as any documentary but using a different format
   It was over complicated so I ended up skipping sections
   It was difficult to navigate so I got lost
   It took up more time
   I learned less because I was spending more time clicking than listening and
   learning
Other:

Is being able to interact and 'do something' (discuss issues with other users,
   independently follow a story, share with friends) something that would make you
   more interested in content that is about complex issues of development or social
change? Why? *
Please explain your answer in the box marked 'Other'
   Yes
   No
   Other:

How much more/less interesting would a documentary with options for
   interactivity (e.g., discussion with those in the doc and other users, ability to click
   on different links and control your own path in the story) be to you than a linear
non-interactive documentary dealing with the same subject? *
Please explain your answer in the box marked 'Other'
   Much more
   Slightly more
   Neutral
   Less
   Other:

Is being able to interact (discuss, click, explore, share, co-create) something that
   would make you feel more interested in an issue that you usually don't think about
in comparison to reading an article or watching a linear programme or film on the
same topic? Explain why *
Please explain your answer in the box below marked 'Other'
   Yes
   No
   Other:

Do you feel the way Inside Disaster was presented, as an immersive simulation,
   made the people, places and experiences presented feel more three dimensional/
less distant / more distant / the same as if they had been presented via a written
article or linear doc? *
Please explain your answer in the box below marked 'Other'
   More three dimensional
   Less distant
   More distant
   The same
   Other:

Do you feel the way Inside Disaster was presented, as an immersive simulation,
   made the issues and tensions dealt with easier/ clearer/ same / more difficult / to
understand than if they had been presented via a written article or linear doc? *
Please explain your answer in the box below marked 'Other'

Easier
Clearer
Same
More difficult
Other:

In your opinion, what are the benefits of using interactive formats to communicate the often complex issues of development and social change? *

In your opinion, what were the benefits of using the interactive format in Inside Disaster to communicate messages about humanitarian disaster and the tensions around it? *

In your opinion, what are the pitfalls to using interactive formats to communicate the often complex issues of development and social change? *

In your opinion, what were the pitfalls of using the interactive format in Inside Disaster to communicate messages about humanitarian disaster and the tensions around it? *

How do you feel the interactive format used in Inside Disaster affected the way you engaged with the issues dealt with? *
This can be positive or negative. Engagement can mean how you understood the issues, how the issues made you feel, what the issues made you want to do, whether you came away feeling differently about the issues than you did before, etc.

How do you think interactive formats might affect the way audiences more generally might engage with the issues presented? *
Could interactivity increase interest? Does it ensure attention is held longer? Does it bring issues closer to home by immersing users? Or does it mean audiences only get superficial understandings of the issues because they can skip content? Are interactive formats largely all style and no substance? What are YOUR thoughts?

Do you think the format used in Inside Disaster allows you to get a broader view of the issues than a linear documentary might be able to? Why? *

Yes
No
Other:

Before being introduced to Inside Disaster, did you know anything about the issues dealt with? *
If yes, please explain how much/what you knew in the box marked 'Other'

Yes
No
Other:
Do you feel you have an increased understanding of the issues presented in Inside Disaster as a result of being able to see multiple perspectives and accounts and interact with different media? *
Please explain why in the box marked 'Other'
   Yes
   No
   Other:

Whilst interacting with Inside Disaster did you learn any new information that you weren't previously aware of? *
If yes please give details of what you learned in the box marked 'Other'
   Yes
   No
   Other:

Do you feel you learned more through interacting with the Inside Disaster site than perhaps you would have through reading an article or watching a linear documentary that gave one perspective? *
Please explain why in the box marked 'Other'
   Yes
   No
   Other:

Did you feel more inclined to act on the issues dealt with in Inside Disaster when you were interacting? For e.g. by sharing the story through social media, donating to aid efforts, independently researching the issues further or finding out more about aid workers/journalists/survivors of humanitarian disaster/those in Haiti etc *
Please why in the box marked 'Other'
   Yes
   No
   Other:

Did you feel more inclined to take up the opportunity to share, debate and discuss the content in Inside Disaster than you would have if you read an article or watched a linear documentary on the same issues? *
Please explain why in the box marked 'Other'
   Yes
   No
   Other:

Did you share the Inside Disaster experience with anyone, either via posting a link on social media, talking to friends, email etc? *
   Yes
   No
   Other:

Please select which of the following words/phrases you feel are most relevant to your experiences of the interactive documentary format? *
Please feel free to add other words/phrases or expand upon why you think certain words/phrases are relevant
Would you be willing to participate in a short (30 mins max) Skype interview during December 2013, to go into more depth about your experience of interacting with Inside Disaster and your thoughts on the area of interactive documentary and development/social change? *
If yes please make sure you've provided your email address in the box marked 'Other' for contact purposes. None of your details will be shared with others, Skype contacts can be deleted after the interview upon request and all information gleaned within the interview will be anonymous.

Yes
No
Other:

Appendix B: Semi-structured qualitative interview guide
a) How would you describe the experience of interacting with Inside Disaster in your own words?

b) What do you think the benefits might be to using an interactive format to communicate complex issues of development and social change?

c) Which forms of interaction do you find most engaging and why?

d) Did the interactive format make you feel more inclined to act and why?

e) What forms of action did you feel most inclined to take?

f) If there were opportunities to connect with the subjects of the interactive doc, pose questions, get answers etc, would this be engaging? Why?
Appendix C: Extra data

Awra Amba schools survey group

The age range of respondents within this group was 15-18, although the majority of respondents, 63%, were aged 16.

![Age distribution data for the Awra Amba school survey respondents](image1)

The majority of respondents within this group were Norwegian, however, there were a small number of immigrant Norwegian respondents within the group, including Polish, Ethiopian, Danish and Dutch.

![Nationality data for the Awra Amba schools survey respondents](image2)

Awra Amba adult survey group

The age range surveyed within this group was diverse, ranging from 18 to 78. The largest age group, which constituted 37% of all respondents, was 26-30, followed by 31-35’s (17%) and 22-25’s (10%).
While the majority of respondents, 63%, were native Norwegian within this group there was some diversity of nationality, including 5 Ethiopians, 2 Eritreans, 1 British, 1 French and 1 Argentinian. There was also a small number of immigrant Norwegian within the group.

Respondents within this group ranged in age from 26 to 45, with the majority of respondents sitting within the 28 to 30 age group.

There were 7 different nationalities identified within this survey group of just 15 respondents, creating a diverse cultural demographic. The largest national group was British, 47%, with American, Yemeni, Ethiopian, Romanian, Finnish and Chinese making up the rest of the group.