

**The Emerging Market for Pocketmedia Storytelling  
in the Developing World**

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## **Abstract**

Pocketmedia<sup>1</sup> storytelling can help change the culture of the developing world. This cultural change creates a new marketplace for certain storytelling information and communication technologies. This paper discusses pocketmedia use in small economies around the world.

## **Introduction**

Emerging in many nations with underdeveloped economies<sup>2</sup>, the practice of pocketmedia storytelling is a growing field generating many new human narratives around the world.

Pocketmedia storytelling encapsulates the creation of stories and media assets using digital handheld or mobile devices. A pocketmedia device allows users to capture audio, video, or still imagery and distribute these recordings to the Web. These recordings, or digital cultural artifacts, tell important cultural stories, share news and information, entertain, educate, or otherwise communicate various messages, although they may vary in form, effectiveness, and/or level of audience exposure.

As a whole, pocketmedia devices are considerably less-expensive than traditional audio and video storytelling production equipment, such as digital video cameras and high-end digital audio recording gear. Therefore, the low cost of pocketmedia technology softens the entry barrier to the practice of pocketmedia storytelling, promoting its emergence in small economies.

Because pocketmedia-generated texts are distributed on-line, they become a part of the global networked information economy<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, the audience for such stories is not limited to the economies in which they are produced. Users of pocketmedia from the developing world are able to engage equivalent users in more advanced economies, serving to usher participants

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1 See section entitled **Pocketmedia Storytelling**.

2 See section entitled **Nations and Examples**.

3 For the definition of Networked Information Economy, see Benkler, Y. (2006). *The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom*. New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press.

wherever they may be towards a level playing field for the exchange of information and the improvement of the global society.

The proceeding sections define pocketmedia storytelling, document examples of its use in the developing world, and postulate on how pocketmedia establishes a new and vital marketplace for specific kinds of information and communication technologies in countries where more expensive storytelling production equipment may not be widely accessible.

### **Pocketmedia storytelling**

Despite prior and concurrent efforts by various businesses to stake a claim on the pocketmedia moniker<sup>4</sup>, the University of Washington's director of Electronic Relations has invited the on-line community to help define the term “pocketmedia” for the rest of us (Hayward, 2009). In an April, 2009, entry to the UW's “Flip the Media” blog, Harry Hayward explained that the term has yet to be defined by credible agents, asking readers to begin crafting a definition (2009).

Hanson Hosein, director of the Master of Communication in Digital Media program at the same university, offered this definition of pocketmedia:

“[P]ocketmedia” means everyone is a communicator, a filmmaker, a journalist, a content creator, a community organizer, a rabble rouser, a message disrupter, a salesperson, a marketer, a broadcaster, a narrowcaster. [Why?] Because pockets transcend class, culture, gender, occupation, ethnicity and geography! (Hosein, 2009).

Thus, pocketmedia is defined not only by the devices which enable its creation, but also by the content created and the effect distributing that content has on both author and audience.

Pocketmedia storytelling is a unique type of content creation. As I define it, pocketmedia

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4 A simple Web search for the term “pocketmedia” will indicate such.

storytelling takes place when content captured entirely with a pocket-sized device is generated and distributed for the purpose of communicating an idea (or set of ideas), specifically telling some kind of story. Pocketmedia devices can be cellular phones, Flip Media camcorders<sup>5</sup>, point-and-shoot digital cameras, or other small devices that fit in the average clothing pocket. Typically, the format of captured content will be comprised of moving images, but still imagery and audio can also be captured and used to craft pocketmedia stories.

Finally, it should be noted that while any individual pocketmedia-produced content item may communicate certain ideas and exist as *de minimus* abstract narrative through strictly objective interpretation, such as a profile picture, ideally, pocketmedia stories will possess some level of Aristotelian methodology<sup>6</sup>, or they will otherwise take on a persistent communal narrative as they become repeatedly shared. However, the application of any methodology is not always necessary to qualify any content item as a story in the liberalist sense.

### **Global pocketmedia**

The world is witnessing – and will continue to witness through its ongoing rapid penetration – the global dissemination and adoption of mobile phone technology (Kalba, 2008). Because of this widespread diffusion, handheld and mobile devices enabled with pocketmedia production functionalities (e.g., audio recording features, video recording features, web browsing capabilities for uploading content, and so forth) are naturally becoming more available in the developing world. Thus, participation in pocketmedia storytelling cannot be limited to users in advanced economies.

Unfortunately, according to a recent report from the International Telecommunications

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5 See Flip's official website, <http://www.theflip.com/en-us/>, for more.

6 See Poetics (Aristotle). (2009, October 31). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 4 December 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetics\\_%28Aristotle%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetics_%28Aristotle%29).

Union (ITU), a global “digital divide” still persists between those in the developed world that have Internet access and those in the underdeveloped world who do not (Tryhorn, 2009). For instance, many developing nations continue to lack widespread wired telecommunications infrastructures capable of supplying broadband Web access (2009).

Thankfully, Vodafone, a major supplier of mobile phones to the developing world – and thus a good indicator of market direction in emerging economies – maintains that mass market Internet access will be achieved through mobile approaches (Borthwick, 2009). Moreover, emerging markets consultant Tomi Ahonen argues that mobile phones are increasingly becoming the “first screen”, or first method by which users in the developing world access the Internet (Ahonen, 2009).

Ultimately, mobile devices are closing the digital divide, enabling pocketmedia creation in the developing world.

At this very moment, it is not difficult to imagine any number of mobile users, in any given developing nation, picking up their pocketmedia-capable devices and producing pocketmedia stories, even as you read this. Or, to borrow the logic from infinite parallel universe theory<sup>7</sup>, the simultaneous diffusion of pocketmedia devices and wireless broadband would indicate that “anything that can happen, will happen”. In other words, pocketmedia storytelling is set to become a global phenomenon; culture happens.

## **Nations and Examples**

There are many voices seeking to define what is meant by the phrase “developing world”, more so than could be discussed fairly here. For purposes of this paper, the UNDP<sup>8</sup>, or United

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7 See <http://askville.amazon.com/Parallel-universes-worlds-theory-logical-rebuttal/AnswerViewer.do?requestId=55796557> for a discussion of infinite parallel universe theory.

8 See <http://www.undp.org/> for specifics about the United Nations Development Programme.

Nations Development Programme's 2009 Human Development Index<sup>9</sup> (HDI) was used to select nations in which to find examples of pocketmedia storytelling.

The HDI ranks nations according to human development statistics (*Human Development Reports*, 2009). As HDI scores factor in individual countries' gross domestic product<sup>10</sup> (GDP) with other assessors of human development such as life expectancy<sup>11</sup>, the HDI becomes our yardstick for measuring what constitutes economic size as compared to living conditions. Generally speaking, a nation with a low HDI score will exhibit poor living conditions, thus low GDP – or, in other words, a low HDI means a nation has a small economy and can be labeled as “developing”. Conversely, nations with a high HDI score are considered “developed”.

Using the 2009 HDI, I have chosen two nations considered to have medium human development, namely Kenya and Iran, and another nation considered to have low human development, namely Guinea, as economies from which to share examples of pocketmedia storytelling. Although the rate of device penetration may vary from nation-to-nation in these examples, the fact that pocketmedia storytelling is taking place in these economies indicates some level of emerging marketplace foothold. This growing foothold is helping these nations to situate themselves as active participants within the global networked information economy.

Finally, I have deviated from the HDI and chosen to use Israel and Palestine as another example of an emerging market for pocketmedia storytelling.

## **Pocketmedia in Kenya**

The African continent presents itself as one of the best places for growth in pocketmedia

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9 The UNDP Human Development Index is maintained at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>.

10 For an explanation of GDP, see Gross domestic product. (2009 December 4). In *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. Retrieved 4 December 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gross\\_domestic\\_product](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gross_domestic_product).

11 See Human Development Index. (2009, December 4). In *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. Retrieved 4 December 2009, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hdi>.

storytelling. According to the ITU, as of March 2009, Africa has the highest growth rate of mobile subscriptions world-wide (Mensah, 2009). At MobileAfrica.org, a blog about the social impact of mobile technology, journalist Ann-Ryan Heatwole recently reported that citizen journalists in Kenya, among other African nations, are being trained to use cell-phones, such as the Nokia N79 with built in video camera functionality, to capture and edit news stories (Heatwole, 2009). This information indicates that devices with pocketmedia functionality are beginning to penetrate growing mobile markets, such as that found in Africa.

Kenya stands as no exception to this African growth in pocketmedia storytelling. In 2007, citizen journalists were already using pocketmedia devices to record stories of life in the slums of Nairobi (Elmendorp, 2007). In late 2007, and spilling over in to the next year, Kenya saw a wave of violence following their national presidential election. Kenyan bloggers were able to capture video and tell stories of the violence using cell phones, distributing this content on-line (Haber, 2008). Reports like this reflect the growth of pocketmedia in Kenya, as well as across the rest of Africa.

Widespread diffusion of pocketmedia devices may help educational institutions like the Kenyan-based East African School of Media Studies<sup>12</sup> empower more video storytellers. Donald Giesen, University of Washington alum and director of the school, has expressed on the UW's Flip the Media blog a pressing need for video capture equipment at his school, which as of April 2009 possessed only one camera (Giesen, 2009). Instead of costly higher-end equipment, Giesen may be able to acquire more inexpensive pocketmedia recording devices. Giesen could deploy these inexpensive cameras, such as the Flip camcorder, or encourage use of video-capable cell phones, to help meet the production needs of his students.

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<sup>12</sup> See East African School of Media Studies. (2009, October 29). On *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. Retrieved 3 December 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East\\_African\\_School\\_of\\_Media\\_Studies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_African_School_of_Media_Studies).

## **Pocketmedia in Iran**

Like Kenya in 2007 and 2008, Iran saw its own share of violent protests during the immediate aftermath of this past summer's heavily disputed Iranian presidential election. Once more, pocketmedia helped citizen journalists and other observers to capture stories of the violence and share these videos with the rest of the world via the Internet. One particular cell phone video, capturing the point-blank shooting death of protester Neda Agha-Soltan, was shared widely by users of the micro-blogging social media service Twitter<sup>13</sup>, capturing the attention of the social media world (*Neda' becomes rallying cry for Iranian protests*, 2009). Twitter users created a hashtag<sup>14</sup> entitled #Neda to share tweets<sup>15</sup> in her honor (2009). At the time of publication of this paper, the Neda hashtag is still tracking several tweets per hour, nearly six months after Agha-Soltan's death.

The example of Neda Agha-Soltan and the pocketmedia video of her death is testament to the power of pocketmedia content in the hands of social media users. Although the Iranian government reportedly attempted to prevent foreign journalists from reporting on protests, citizen pocketmedia creators in Iran were able to circumvent their information roadblock and share news with the global networked information economy (Mercier, 2009).

## **Pocketmedia in Guinea**

As previously noted, pocketmedia storytelling need not be limited to audio and video. Sometimes pictures taken on cell phones can be used to communicate a story, even if not by the strictest interpretation. Images can be circulated by pocketmedia users, creating a collective mental-communal narrative of events captured. Device-to-device file transfers via Bluetooth,

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13 See <http://twitter.com>.

14 For a definition of hashtags, see Hashtags. (2009, November). On *Twitter Fan Wiki*. Retrieved 4 December 2009, from <http://twitter.pbworks.com/Hashtags>.

15 Tweet is the nickname for all micro-blog posts on Twitter.

USB, email, or uploaded and downloaded with social media Web services like Flickr, Twitpic, and Facebook, can facilitate the generation of these collective social narratives.

This was the case recently in Conakry, Guinea, where an anonymous cell phone user snapped images of Guinean soldiers targeting and raping women during the crackdown of a public political demonstration (Nossiter, 2009). These pictures have been shared across the Guinea citizenry thanks to pocketmedia technology (2009). Since Guinea is a predominantly religiously conservative nation, the images have fueled express public rage at the behavior of the government, and are helping to change the international opinion of Guinean leader Moussa Dadis Camara (2009).

Ironically, perhaps the further proliferation of pocketmedia technology like the cell phone camera will eventually spell the ouster of the dictator Camara. Yet again, the power of pocketmedia to change a developing nation is being exhibited.

Examples such as the October Guinean cell phone pictures, the death of Agha-Soltan in Iran, and video blogging of violence in Kenya all clearly indicate that an emerging market for mobile devices with pocketmedia functionality exists in the developing world.

### **Gazamom: An example of pocketmedia for Israel and Palestine**

Not all pocketmedia storytelling in the developing world focuses on raw journalism or popular current events. Pocketmedia devices can also be used to create messages of social and political change, helping to bridge the digital divide. Sometimes this can be achieved simply by relaying personal stories. No where does this seem more useful than in Israel and Palestine, where in many ways the developed world and the developing world collide on a daily basis.

In April 2009, Palestinian blogger and mother of two Laila El-Haddad, documented her

ordeal trying to travel with her US born children from the United States back to Gaza via Egypt (Hussaini, 2009). El-Haddad was stopped at the border by Egyptian authorities, and after many hours of interrogation was prevented entry to her homeland (2009). Using Twitter, she posted updates of her experience and mentioned using a Flip minoHD camcorder to record her journey (2009). Yet again, pocketmedia, in this case the Flip camcorder, was put to use for purposes of pocketmedia storytelling. The story of one Palestinian mother's attempts to bring her American children to her developing home state demonstrate the growing global prevalence of pocketmedia.

If more Palestinians begin using technology like the Flip camcorder to tell their personal stories, perhaps social and political change will occur in the Holy Land as hearts are softened and voices heard through pocketmedia. As a developed nation with plenty of broadband Internet diffusion, Israelis will have the opportunity to become exposed to these texts and shape new opinions based on knowledge acquired from the global networked information commons.

## **Conclusion**

The mass adoption of mobile phones and other mobile communication devices with Internet accessibility in the developing economies of the world will help to promote the use of pocketmedia technology and the production of pocketmedia content. Though the economies from which this pocketmedia storytelling will emerge are meager as compared their counterparts in the developed world, their cultural entries, as assets in the data recesses of the global information economy, represent the beginnings of a larger global-societal shift. This global-societal shift happens in the way in which developing nations and developed nations communicate with one another. Pocketmedia storytelling is a catalyst of this shift.

Thus, there stands today a global emerging marketplace for pocketmedia devices because

pocketmedia storytelling can change culture in the developing world. This cultural change, signaled by the pocketmedia production of new cultural artifacts, as depicted in all of the examples above, help define a new marketplace for this particular type of storytelling information and communication technology.

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