Rationale

The concept of a “digital divide” dates back to the mid-1990s, when the US Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications & Information Administration (NTIA) published several reports detailing the access to and usage of the Internet. At the conclusion of their three reports, NTIA found that the "the digital divide—the divide between those with access to new technologies and those without—is now one of America's leading economic and civil rights issues.” However, technology has evolved quickly within the past thirty years, and the widespread use of smartphones has put the Internet in everyone’s pockets. In fact, according to GSMA Intelligence, the research arm of the cellular standards-setting body, global saturation of mobile phones will reach almost 80% within the next five years (2018). Consequently, the NTIA’s notion of a digital divide has had to change as well. While access is still a consideration, it is no longer a major component of this issue. In fact, as Warschauer (2003) observes, “The notion of a binary divide between haves and have-nots is thus inaccurate and can even be patronizing because it fails to value the social resources diverse groups bring to the table.” As the forensics community moves to online tournaments, we must explore the how different programs may experience a digital divide as skills, resources, and access could differ broadly across our community. As Ragnedda (2017) argues, the digital sphere is stratified, meaning that social and digital stratification follow the same patterns and can reproduce the same hierarchies. He particularly notes that several studies spanning digital usage in political participation, healthcare and education are already intertwined with existing social inequalities across three dimensions: class, based on possession of the means of production and professional credentials or qualifications; status, recognized through lifestyle (clothing, housing, way of speaking, etc.); and finally parties, groups of individuals working together on the basis of origins, objectives or interests. In forensics we could see the same stratification. In terms of class, teams having access to filming technology, studio space, microphones and qualified media instructors would be at a disadvantage over schools that do not. Status will still be communicated through clothing, but environment of the speaker could be revealed through visual cues in their backing and manners of speaking could be exacerbated by limited microphone technologies. Larger teams will have more people to film multiple attempts or could pool technological resources and knowledge.

Considering these potential transitions, it is essential to explore how different forms of digital capital could produce new forms of inequity. In our status quo, face to face competition means that everyone has a somewhat standardized experience. The judge sits the same distance from the performance space, each competitor is speaking in the same setting with the same acoustics. Real time competition means everyone shares the burden of being an audience member. The pressures of a live performance must be learned by each and the number of events one may choose to participate in is limited by their ability to handle the physical demands on energy and time. However, moving to Information and Communication and Technology (ICT) based communication means that we will also be transitioning to a mass communication given our new reliance on technology and our change in delivery systems. While debate will face similar struggles, theirs will still be an interactive act, relying primarily on critical thinking, reasoning and argumentation. However the artistic elements already present in individual events could be enhanced through elements of mass media production. The potential for manipulation of artistic proofs inherent in cinematic elements means our community needs to make sure that we have paired our instruction with an enhanced visual literacy. Warschauer (2003) notes visual literacy is not one component, but exists among various dimensions as a result of social
practice, including access to physical artifacts, content, skills, and social support. Meaning literacy is a matter not only of education but also of power derived from social, political and financial capital. In particular, Ragnedda (2017) observes digital divides exist along a spectrum due to differences along four dimensions: mental access, material access, usage access and skills access.

First, mental access is mainly based on the interest in using ICTs. So teams who already use technology for an enhanced social presence, distance coaching, online meetings and alumni outreach could be more advantaged over other who have been slower to engage in the digital sphere. Next, material (or physical) access is based on people’s possession of digital devices and access to technology. Although it is the aspect of the digital divide that has attracted the most attention, especially in education. Our current shortcomings in this area became more apparent during stay-at-home initiatives implemented during the recent Covid 19 pandemic. Internet bandwidth, speeds and even reliability could further increase stratification in our community. Third, usage access is derived from a lack of usage opportunities. Basically, teams that have already participated in virtual or online tournaments from second semester will already have an upper hand over teams that will have to develop their visual literacy in half the time. Finally, access skills is the result of possessing the necessary digital skills for Internet use, including production and distribution. Hohlfeld, et al, (2017) observes that a lack of teacher knowledge and credentials impacts their perception of their student’s knowledge base regarding ICT. As a result, instructors tend to think their young scholars know more or can figure it out on their own. This is not to say the most coaches are not familiar with the benefits of videotaping performances, Sautter and Zúniga (2018) reveal, “Students who participate in oral communication using video technology on average spend more time practicing their presentations, have the ability to revise their presentations as many times as necessary and consequently feel more comfortable making oral presentations across a variety of formats”. However, filming for personal consumption can be quite different than filming for competitive ends. Having judged an online tournament and participated in the National Forensics Association’s Performance of Distinction, I could not help but notice that there were some basic issues in filming that could disadvantage a competitor over the long term, particularly if judges were not aware of unconscious bias that are triggered by visual cues that we have built up of a lifetime of consuming media, particular television and film. Consequently, it is this author’s intent to explore some of the issues that may arise as we explore online competitions.

**Challenges**

- *Tournament Construction* – Tournaments cannot run the same online and the prep will be different. The University of Kentucky’s Digital Speech and Debate Initiative has published a best practice guide:


  They have compiled a pretty comprehensive layout including issues like how best to communicate with participants, adjusting for time zones, shipping for trophies, exploring different platforms, and a variety of tournament administrative issues.

- *Synchronous vs Asynchronous* –First, synchronous. Debate tournaments have already experimented with synchronous, and according to George Mason University’s Assistant Director of Forensics, Jackie Probst, the online tournaments they participated in had some difficulty with
technology and scheduling. While a phone line was available, the tournament would often get way off schedule first. Our debate team is also pre-books about twenty rooms each weekend to hold rounds in, although concerns about Mason’s streaming capability since it can disappear every couple of days for a few minutes. They are also concerned about how to maintain our institution’s COVID guidelines while still having enough people in the room to film and debate in pairs. In contrast, asynchronous competition would allow for pre-recorded videos, which would alleviate scheduling and streaming issues to an extent. But tournaments would also have to establish guidelines for how recent the video must be. Would it be possible to use one video all semester? It would be helpful to have someone else record performances, which would also interfere with COVID regulations. Assuming a team can cover entry fees and judge obligations, how many asynchronous tournaments can we participate in over the course of the weekend? Could someone qualify for AFA over one weekend?

- **Legal Issues** – This can range from First Amendment concerns such as who owns the performance? Should we record? How long should we hold onto recording? Should a judge “be alone” with a contestant in an event room? Will there need to be release forms for every tournament? Are there any specific protections we should be offering for underage competitors?

- **Gender** – Not surprisingly, there are numerous studies that suggest video performance and ICT is not evaluated equally across gender. Veletsianos, et al (2018) observe that greater neutrality is afforded to male presenters whereas female presenters tend to receive more extreme responses, both towards positive and negative polarity. They warn “individuals who encourage and prepare faculty and students to participate online (e.g., faculty, faculty developers, social media trainers) should recognize that male and female faculty will have different experiences online.”

- **Race** – It is no secret that original film technology was developed using Shirley cards to calibrate color, which was essentially a white woman with brown hair wearing black and white, standing in front of a gray background. It wasn’t until the eighties that we saw the Shirley card include anyone else. While digital technology has helped, Lewis (2019) notes, “If the light source is artificial, digital technology will still struggle with darker skin. Researchers such as Joy Buolamwini of the MIT Media Lab have been advocating to correct the algorithmic bias that exists in digital imaging technology. The same technology that misrecognizes individuals is also used in services for loan decisions and job interview searches.” Lewis goes on to observe that some adjustments can be made if we pay attention to lighting, but rectifying this inherited bias requires a lot of work.”
Filming Practices – Much of our visual literacy comes from the language we have accrued from a lifetime of media exposure. The following are some suggestions and observations to mitigate stratification derived from technical knowledge. Many of the suggestions are pulled from websites devoted to giving audition tips while self-filming, which is an increasingly common phenomenon in the arts. These websites include the Screen Actors Guild, Frat Pack Productions, Nate’s Violin, The Artist’s Aesthetic, National Student Theater, Backstage Magazine, and the casting director, Heidi Marshall.

- **Camera Quality**: While cell phones work, they do have limited production capabilities and not all camera phones are created equal. Backstage Magazine advises to NOT use the camera in a laptop. Digital cameras have better picture quality, and memory cards store large amounts of data so that you can directly upload a high quality video. Many institutions have access to media labs which will allow you to check out equipment for short periods of time. This equipment would normally be worth thousands. Some students that are serious about photography may already have a high quality camera. Backstage Magazine recommends the Canon EOS Rebel T7i, Which averages $650 and their accessory bundles which includes a variety of lenses, memory card, tripod, and camera case, which can cost another $450.

- **Cell Phone** – If cell phones are used, nearly all of the websites consulted recommended some accessories, including rigs, an external lens, tripod, lights and mic. Rigs make it easier to stabilize your cellphone and allow you to connect it to a tripod. Backstage Magazine recommends the Aoonar ll078 Universal Smartphone Adapter, which runs about $18.
The Ulanzi Smartphone Video Rig, $25, lets you plug in a microphone for optimal sound and lights as well.

The last rig is an Iographer phone case, which ranges between fifty and sixty dollars. They are compatible with tripods and fit securely in the case, which is safer for the phone. Tripods will keep the image stable and allow you to set the camera up at eye level, which is less awkward for the performer and will create a better visual. The UBeeSize Phone Tripod is only $15 is a shorter tripod with a universal phone clip and flexible legs.
Taller tripods are double in price although some options do include a rig for lights as well.

If camera capability of your phone is inferior, you can augment it with an external lens, which range from $17 to $50. Images will be clearer and the camera will pick up micro-expressions and less of a lag time during blocking or transition walks.

- **Framing** – Think of this is what the camera sees, which ideally is what you want your audience to focus on. If the performer is too far away, we miss subtle movements and expressions. If it is too close, the performer will overwhelm the frame and we miss key aspect of the performance, such stance, blocking, or physicality. As Backstage Experts Risa Bramon Garcia and Steve Braun write, “Yes, in theater you have to reach the back of the house. And in film and TV, you have to reach the person a foot in front of you when the camera frame is tighter.”
The Medium Wide would be most advisable, with the closest one should get is what is called the Cowboy Shot. It earns its name because it traditionally includes the gun holsters on a cowboy’s belt and leaves room at the sides so one can gesture and move comfortably without worrying about stepping out of frame.

Shoot in landscape and not portrait and try to have the camera at eye level; performers should not have to look down or up, which can be physically unflattering and awkward. If the performer chooses not to make direct eye contact with camera lens, then they should look at the person filming, who ideally would be as close to the lens as possible. This gives intimacy without being too direct.
Tight framing does not mean no movement. It is still possible to maximize the levels and dynamics within a frame. Filming for a camera means that we may have to sacrifice excessive physicality in order to be close enough to pick up on micro-expressions. Performers who like to “go big” may have to reign in big movements. Taping the floor so the performer knows what they have to work with will also be helpful. Aim for a consistent, constant shot with minimal camera movement.

- **Sound** – This can be influenced by both space and camera quality. Some spaces are filled with hard, flat surfaces that can distort sound. Think of sound in a parking garage and the slight echoes that accompany it. The worst rooms are small, all hard surfaces and right angles. Try to find a carpeted room or seats with padding to naturalize the sound. Also, most cell phone technology is not prepared to handle extreme changes in volume, so “screamers are dreamers” is particularly true, but also whisperers as well. With this in mind, try to minimize background noise as much possible so the performer is not competing against external stimuli the judge and audience cannot see. The National Student Theatre recommends and external mic, like the Bova BY-M1 Microphone from Amazon for $19.95, for clearer sound and less background noise. Always do a sound check, paying attention to both the loudest and softest parts of the performances. Backstage is a little more emphatic, saying you should never use a phone without an external microphone and recommend the Rode VideoMic Me Directional Microphone ($60).
• **Lighting** – Natural light is a good start but it is not enough. Time of day and weather changes means the visibility of the competitor will change throughout the performance. It is also not strong enough and images will be dim. When the performer is well lit, the camera has its best chance of getting the clearest picture and adjusting for movement. Two common mistakes: Backlighting, where the light comes from behind the performer and will leave their face in shadows; this can also occur if the performer standing next to a window, which will leave half the face dark. Second, overhead light, especially if it strong florescent light or stage lighting will create harsh shadows on the performers face, think horror films. It can also create hot spots which flatten out facial features. Ring lights are a solid bet and are available for around forty dollars.

Lamps with no shades could also work. A light in front of the competitor and one behind on the ground will eliminate background shadows as well. Well placed lights will give reflect “eye lights”, which viewers respond favorably to. However, do not use the flashlight feature on a phone because the light is too harsh.
Environment – Digital technology works by recording changes, so when the contrast is too great, the image becomes flattened out (watch fire or an explosion on a DVD). So patterned clothes and backgrounds can be distracting. Backgrounds should be simple, solid color with few visual distractions. Performers should avoid wearing clothes that are the same color as the background. A bright white wall competes visually for the lens’ adjustment. Most casting offices will have a blue or green wall, which can be duplicated with a colored sheet. Muted colors such as a gray or beige or cream will also work. Collapsible backgrounds are also available for around forty dollars.

Don’t stand right up against the wall; even two feet of distance can make a big difference in how the video looks.

Visual Aids/Handouts – I have no idea.

Conclusion

This paper is not intended to be a shopping list. The contents of this paper is to point out we visually translate lighting, sound, color, and camera movement every time we watch mass communication. Those with training in ow to utilize those artistic proofs will widen the digital divide, as will those with access or budgets to upgrade technology. What we gain in accessibility, we also risk increased stratification.
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