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Project report

MACS390, "Media, war and peace"

Autumn session, 2012

Media and Cultural Studies, University of Wollongong

The project report assignment had two parts. For details of the assignment see
http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/MACS390_12outline.pdf

Brittany Reeves prepared (1) an information pack in the form of web page (see address on next page) and (2) a fictional dialogue on doing the project, below.

- The link to this document is from http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/mwp_tops.html.

MACS390 Project Report

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Project is located at:

http://prezi.com/_91xpastcpbn/present/?auth_key=vioepma&follow=w7t63wcaxsox
http://prezi.com/_91xpastcpbn/macs390-project/

or

http://prezi.com/_91xpastcpbn/macs390-project/

(click "fullscreen" and use arrows to navigate through the presentation.)

If you have any problems accessing or loading the presentation, please let me know. It can also be found via a search on the Prezi website under "MACS390 Project".

References: (information pack)

1. B. Martin, *Justice Ignited: The Dynamics of Backfire*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2007, p. 179
2. Martin, *Justice Ignited*, p. 3
3. Martin, *Justice Ignited,* p. 3
4. Martin, *Justice Ignited,* p. 184
5. Martin, *Justice Ignited,* p. 6
6. Martin, *Justice Ignited,* pp. 4-5
7. Martin, *Justice Ignited,* pp. 6-7
8. International Criminal Court, *Warrant of arrest for Joseph Kony issued on 8 July 2005 as amended on 27 September 2005*, Document number: ICC-02/04-01/05, pp. 12-19
9. See Oyston, G, 'We got trouble', http://visiblechildren.tumblr.com/post/18890947431/we-got-trouble and Quinton, M, 'Kony 2012 campaign hits back at critics: Group responds to claims of financial secrecy', *The Sun*, 14th March 2012, (online) http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/4191933/Kony-2012-campaign-hits-back-at-critics.html
10. Brown *et al*, *React and Respond: The Phenomenon of* Kony 2012, Outreach Council of the African Studies Association, April 13 2012, (online) http://concernedafricascholars.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Kony-React-Respond.pdf
11. Oyston, G. *Visible Children: Kony 2012, viewed critically*, www.visiblechildren.tumblr.com
12. Invisible Children, *KONY 2012: Part II – Beyond Famous*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_Ue6REkeTA&feature=relmfu

Image credits: (information pack)

1. O'Donnell, D, 'Thing of the Week: Kony 2012', *USM Free Press*, 12th March 2012, (online) http://usmfreepress.org/2012/03/12/odonnell-the-unbearable-slightness-of-kony-2012/
2. Quinton, M, 'Kony 2012 campaign hits back at critics: Group responds to claims of financial secrecy', *The Sun*, 14th March 2012, (online) http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/4191933/Kony-2012-campaign-hits-back-at-critics.html
3. Screen capture from International Criminal Court, *Warrant of arrest for Joseph Kony issued on 8 July 2005 as amended on 27 September 2005*, Document number: ICC-02/04-01/05, p. 1
4. Screen capture from Invisible Children, *KONY 2012*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc
5. Screen capture from Invisible Children, *KONY 2012*
6. Screen capture from Invisible Children, *KONY 2012*
7. Screen capture from Invisible Children, *KONY 2012*
8. Screen capture from Invisible Children, *KONY 2012*
9. Holden, C, 'Kony 2012 Timeline [Infographic]', *Huffington Post*, 29th March 2012 (online), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-holden/kony-2012-timeline_b_1387729.html
10. Screen capture from Invisible Children, *KONY 2012: Part II – Beyond Famous*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_Ue6REkeTA&feature=relmfu

Dialogue:

Between:
*A member of the public, someone who has just viewed the information pack: **MOP***
*Student, the creator of the information pack: **STU***

STU: So, after taking the time to look at my information pack, what are your thoughts?

MOP: I didn't realise there was so much to consider about backfire! What made you decide to research this?

STU: I was one of the tens of millions of people who watched the 'KONY 2012' video after it was released on YouTube. It was such a powerful video that it really made me stop and think about the issue being addressed. I was swept up in the initial enthusiasm and widespread social activism via social media. Many of my friends shared the video online and urged others to do the same. Given these positive beginnings, I was surprised to see such a strong negative backlash develop a short time later. I thought it would be interesting to explore how such a compelling and popular video could backfire. Initially, I didn't even consider the initial backfire over the issue of child soldiers because of how much the 'second' backfire over the video interested me. However in the end, I realised that looking at both examples of backfire would give a more thorough understanding of how the actions to inhibit and amplify outrage can be applied to this case study.

MOP: So how did you find out about this negative backlash?

STU: Initially, it was through social media. I began to notice my friends giving their opinions on whether or not Invisible Children was a legitimate organisation to donate to. One of the main criticisms that I could relate to straight away was the sensationalist aspect of the video, with its use of music, graphics, and flashy editing.[1] These initial criticisms prompted me to do a bit of research, and I discovered one of the most useful sources that dealt with the outrage over the video. There's a blog called Visible Children[2], which was started by a

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[1] O'Donnell, D, 'Thing of the Week: Kony 2012', *USM Free Press*, 12th March 2012, (online), http://usmfreepress.org/2012/03/12/odonnell-the-unbearable-slightness-of-kony-2012/
[2] Oyston, G. *Visible Children: Kony 2012, viewed critically*, www.visiblechildren.tumblr.com

university student from Nova Scotia, Canada. The entire blog is dedicated to a criticism of the video campaign, and provides a wealth of information in the form of links to articles, YouTube responses, and media excerpts that deal with the Kony debate. A simple Google search of "Kony 2012 criticism" generated a multitude of results, covering the main criticisms of the video campaign.[3]

MOP: Wow, it sounds like there's been more criticism directed towards the video than towards Kony himself.

STU: Initially, that's how it appeared to me, which was why I wanted to look exclusively at that as an example of backfire.

MOP: Why didn't you?

STU: I realised that in order to give better context, and to effectively illustrate the complexities of backfire, I needed to look at the initial outrage that was generated over the issue of child soldiers, and then compare it to the outrage over the video campaign, even if I was not able to explore them in as much detail as I would have if I'd only chosen one.

MOP: That makes sense. It sounds like you edited and changed your ideas a fair bit?

STU: I did. Although the theory and case study remained the same, I changed my focus several times as my research progressed and consulting with my lecturer.

MOP: What was the main idea you wanted to communicate?

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[3] For example: 'Criticism of 'KONY 2012' viral video swells in Uganda', *Fox News*, (online) http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/03/15/criticism-kony-2012-viral-video-swells-among-ugandans/ ; Curtis, P. and McCarthy, T, 'Kony 2012: What's the real story?', *The Guardian*, 8th March 2012, (online), http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/reality-check-with-polly-curtis/2012/mar/08/kony-2012-what-s-the-story; Mawby, N 'Social media sensation KONY 2012 cops criticism for 'cashing in'', *Herald Sun*, 9th March 2012, (online) http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/more-news/its-all-over-the-webs-but-what-is-a-kony/story-fn7x8me2-1226293063302; Muhumuza, R, 'Kony 2012 video draws criticism in Uganda', *Huffington Post*, 9th March 2012, (online) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/09/kony-2012-video-criticism-uganda_n_1334549.html

STU: The most important and interesting thing for me was exploring how and why actions or events backfire, whether this is expected or unexpected.[4] I also wanted to provide a clear communication of the tactics, such as exposure, devaluation, and re-interpretation, used by both the perpetrator and opponents of injustice[5], because I could see many of them clearly represented in the case study.

MOP: I noticed that you outlined 5 tactics for each, but didn't apply all the tactics in all cases... why? Is the theory flawed?

STU: That's because all 5 of the tactics are not always applicable. This doesn't make the theory flawed, but rather indicates that it has a variety of different aspects that are designed to fit a wide range of scenarios, rather than being completely applicable to a small number of them. As a grounded theory[6], it is very practical, but the application to this particular case study was a little different from its previous applications. For example, in this case, the playing field is much broader than simply perpetrator, opponent, and audience. There are the victims and the governments to consider, which I found had roles to play within the backfire process. These were not included within the framework, and given the chance for further study, I would like to further examine the roles of these actors. Another interesting aspect was that those who opposed the perpetrator in the initial backfire over child soldiering were unaffected by the perpetrator's actions – in this case, victim and opponent were not the same person or group.

MOP: That sounds interesting. Is there anything else you came across during your research that you found interesting or relevant but weren't able to include?

There were several things that I didn't have a chance to explore in as much depth as I would have liked, due to the word limit and time constraints. In particular, I would like to look at 1) How an action can backfire without any active participation or engagement in the process by the perpetrator, and 2) how a video about someone almost everyone agrees is committing

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[4] Martin (*Justice Ignited: The dynamics of backfire*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2007, p. 187) claims that there are similarities between the idea of backfire and "unexpected" action, which can be seen in examining the outrage over the KONY 2012 video – this is what drew me to look at this example of outrage. However, I also noted that the initial outrage, over Kony and the use of child soldiers, should have been expected to occur. In this case, it was media coverage that made the difference.

[5] Martin, B, *Justice Ignited*, p. 6

[6] Glaser and Strauss, as cited in Martin, B, *Justice Ignited*, p. 169

serious crimes and needs to be stopped, can trigger backfire. This project also raises the issue of "clicktivism"[7] and the potential of social media with regards to the dissemination of ideas and campaigns.

Another concept found particularly intriguing was the role of the Ugandan government, who have spoken out against the video campaign[8], and whether or not they can be considered as an 'opponent' within the framework of backfire, given the physical absence of Kony and the LRA within the debate.

MOP: There's certainly a lot to consider. How did you decide to structure it the way you did? And why did you use this Prezi program instead of a more traditional brochure format?

STU: With regards to the structure, I wanted to present the theory in a way that was clear, concise, and easy to understand. I isolated the key parts of the theory, such as the main definition, the requirements for it to occur, and the actions taken by perpetrators and opponents, and based my structure on that to give my audience a solid theoretical foundation before applying the theory to the case study. I chose to use a Prezi instead of a brochure or poster because it is a medium that allows me a greater amount of control in directing the attention of my audience. By utilising a set path, it forces them to concentrate on one small piece of information at a time, reducing the temptation to look at other things, and making the information easier to digest and understand. It is more visually dynamic, facilitating the embedding of Quicktime and PDF files, and the use of zoom allows me to easily reveal connections and links between concepts. Some of the initial feedback I received from people I showed the information pack to commented on several large blocks of text, and how they were more likely to skip over these parts as opposed to the other sections which were less text-heavy. I edited it in line with these comments to make the information more manageable.

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[7] See: Al Jazeera, 'Is 'clicktivism' destroying meaningful social activism?', *The Stream*, (online) http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/clicktivism-destroying-meaningful-social-activism-0022095
[8] See: Muhumuza, R, 'Kony 2012 video draws criticism in Uganda', *Huffington Post*, 9th March 2012, (online) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/09/kony-2012-video-criticism-uganda_n_1334549.html; Curtis, P, 'Kony 2012: the reaction', *The Guardian*, 13th March 2012 (online), http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/reality-check-with-polly-curtis/2012/mar/13/reality-check-kony-2012-reaction; Pflanz, M, 'Joseph Kony 2012: growing outrage in Uganda over film', *The Telegraph*, 8th March 2012, (online), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/uganda/9131469/Joseph-Kony-2012-growing-outrage-in-Uganda-over-film.html

MOP: Apart from structuring your information, and fitting everything in, did you come across any other problems or difficulties in your project? Did anything surprise you?

STU: One of the main difficulties was sourcing information solely concerning my theory. It was hard to find sources other than the main book I read, so most of my sources were newspaper articles that looked at backfire as it related to the Kony debate.

However, at the same time there was an incredible volume of information, opinion, and criticism about Invisible Children and their film, and it proved very time consuming and overwhelming attempting to sift through it all. Attempting to include an overview of these criticisms within my presentation provided a significant challenge considering the word limits, however I was able to overcome this in part in showing a segment of the second Kony video, which dealt with most of the important criticisms as part of a montage.[9]

What ultimately surprised me was how easy it was to apply many of the aspects of backfire to this case study. I was definitely able to identify a struggle over the language used and the facts presented in the KONY 2012 video. More than anything else, this case study illustrated to me the fact that backfire is often much more than simply an outcome of an action, but also constitutes a process where meaning can be heavily contested, and this is what I aimed to present within my information pack.

MOP: I certainly discovered a lot about these kinds of processes. Thanks for showing this to me.

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[9] Invisible Children, *KONY 2012: Part II – Beyond Famous*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_Ue6REkeTA&feature=relmfu

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