BLOCK 3
VIDEO AND FILM IN SOCIOLOGY OF SOCIETY

UNIT 6   REPRESENTING THROUGH VIDEO AND FILM*

Structure

6.0   OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will able to:

- Discuss the ways in which films and videos are used to represent society

- Explain changing representation of society in visual terms

- Narrate the influence of new technologies in ethnography and

- Discuss the emergence of digital ethnography and its impact in research.

6.1   INTRODUCTION

As we have discussed in Unit 1, 2 and 3 photographs and films have been used by ethnographers and anthropologists to represent society. The development of technology has had a major impact on the ways in which visual representations of society have evolved. Ethnographic research using the visual method began with photographs and progressed to filmmaking. Filmmaking technology has progressed from heavy cameras with reels and no sound recording to lighter cameras with inbuilt sound to digital cameras and also inbuilt cameras in smartphones.

Videos and films have become such an integral part of our day to life that we can scarcely imagine of a time when they did not exist. Films are sources of entertainment, education and information. They are repositories of culture,

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* Written by Dr. Reema Bhatia , Delhi University

representing realities as well as producing fantasy and worlds of imagination. Films have been studied in detail by sociologists and anthropologists to understand cultures. This unit traces the development of film in ethnography through history in the first section. Following this, we will have a discussion on the use of digital technologies on ethnographic film and on research.

In the past few decades, videos as a medium of representation have also gained great popularity. While traditionally films involve high costs and cannot be easily made by everyone, videography is easier and more convenient. Home videos as well as professionally produced ones have become part and parcel of our lives. These films and videos are an important part of representing society irrespective of whether they were made with a smart phone camera or more professional equipment. The final product i.e., a finished film irrespective of whether it is made using sophisticated film equipment or a simple video camera of a mobile phone, is one way in which society is represented visually. The finished product i.e., the film is for public viewing. Anthropologists have also now increasingly begun to use the visual method as a research tool and not just for making films intended for public viewing. They could disseminate their research findings on websites or through interactive blogs where there is freedom to give suggestions and comments. We shall discuss more on this in the later sections.

6.2 ETHNOGRAPHIC FILMS

"Ethnographic films unite the art and skills of a filmmaker with the intellect and insights of the ethnographer" (Heider, 2006, p. ix). Films as representations of society demand that the filmmaker must think ethnographically and the ethnographers need to visualise cinematographically. The opposition between films and ethnography is misleading. Films even if they are made for commercial purposes need some degree of research. Filmmaking as a process involves thinking about society and visualising it cinematically. Better research will always result in a better film irrespective of the purpose for which it is made, whether ethnographic, documentary or commercial. All types of films commercial, documentaries or ethnographic are equally important in understanding society (See Unit 3 for detailted discussion).

6.2.1 Historical Background

The earliest cameras were heavy, bulky and expensive. These cameras used reels and did not have any inbuilt sound recording technology. Sound recording had to be done separately and was often dubbed in the studios. Most often these early films had heavy narration and subtitles. These included films like *Nanook of the North*, *Trance and Dance in Bali* and several others. Anthropologists like Robert J. Flaherty, Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson and Jean Rouch who were the pioneers in filmmaking began by using cameras that were heavy and were largely fixed on a tripod. The equipment was expensive and the cost of running and maintaining the cameras was also high. Repairs were also not easy and spare parts too were expensive. The reels that were used in the cameras were also costly. A typical ethnographic film making expedition in addition to the anthropologist involved a large team including a cameraman, sound recordist and other technicians. It was never a single person expedition. This added to the cost of the entire research process. The high cost of the entire process also meant that there had to be minimal wastage of reel and time spent. This involved a lot of precise planning and left little room for changes. The whole process of filmmaking was very inflexible.

6.2.2 Early History

Sociologists and anthropologists have been using photographs and film to capture 'other cultures' right from the time they were invented. The Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Straits in 1898, was the first documented expedition to use films. It was interdisciplinary and included equipment for films, and photographs (stills). Alfred Cort Haddon who was a part of the expedition was able to record a few short clips of ceremonies of the Islanders. Other anthropologists notably Franz Boas, Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen also used the visual method for participant observation. Spencer and Haddon both used multiple media in research. These included films and photographs. The final presentation combined films, photographs and sound. This is known as 'haptic cinema' i.e., cinema through which the viewer touches and feels the images.

Box. 1: Alfred Cort Haddon (1855-1940)

Alfred Cort Haddon was one of the founders of modern British anthropology. Though his early career and training was in zoology and comparative anatomy, Haddon was responsible, through his teaching and writing in establishing anthropology as an observational science. He distinguished himself as an exponent of anthropology at Cambridge for 30 years. "In 1888 Haddon went to the Torres Strait—the channel between New Guinea and Australia—to study marine biology but instead found himself irresistibly drawn to the indigenous people; thereafter, his interests lay in the study of human societies. He moved to the University of Cambridge in 1893 and began giving lectures in physical anthropology there. In 1898 he organised and led the Cambridge anthropological expedition to the Torres Strait Islands, New Guinea, and Sarawak, in which were worked out some of the basic techniques of anthropological fieldwork, in particular, the use of genealogies" (source:https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alfred-Cort-Haddon)

Seen in this photograph are Haddon with the anthropologist Rivers, along with other members of the Torres Strait expedition

(Pic source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Torres_Straits_1898.jpg#filelinks)

For a small clip of Torres Strait Islanders' ceremonial dance check the link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eDIyhmQtQs

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6.2.3 Further Development

The development of anthropology around World War I under the influence of Bronislaw Malinowski, A.R. Radcliffe Brown, Franz Boas and Marcel Mauss focussed more on observational fieldwork. The anthropologist would observe and record the observations in writing, The emphasis was on the anthropologist creating an 'image' of the society based on their writings. This led to a decline of the visual methods of representing society from 1940s to 1980s. The use of the sensory domains like sound and sight based on films, photographs and videos for research was marginalised. Interestingly, even though these anthropologists took photographs they did not use them for analysis or representations of societies.

There are some instances of photographs and films being used to represent society: Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead's work on the Balinese culture are some such instances. Films like *Trance and Dance in Bali, Bathing Babies in Three Cultures* (1940) by Margaret Mead comparing bathing practices of children by mothers in the Balinese, New Guinea and America. These films can be watched here Bathing Babies in Three Cultures and *Childhood Rivalry in Bali and New Guinea* (1952) on rivaliry amongst children.

There were also have films by Ian Dunlop, Roger Sandall and David MacDougall in the 1970s and 1980s. These works were primarily limited to ethnographic filmmaking and not to other forms of visual representations. Till around the 1980s, mainstream anthropology did not give much importance to the use of visual techniques for research.

Check Your Progress1

1) Compare film making using traditional cameras with videography.

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2) Name some early filmmakers.

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3) List some of the drawbacks of early filmmaking.

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4) What is haptic cinema?

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5) What led to a decline in the use of visual methods from 1940s to 1980s?

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6.3   THE DEVELOPMENT OF VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Sociologists and Anthropologists of the twenty-first century are developing the use of new digital media, and applied visual anthropology in diverse ways. The uses vary from using it in teaching in the classroom to creating images and films to further the boundaries of the discipline. Sarah Pink, Marcus Banks, Andy Lawrence, Stephen Hughes, Christopher Pinney, Paulo Faveroare some of the important scholars in this field.

Since the 1980s, when the video made an appearance, its simplicity, convenience, durability and cost effectiveness became very popular with researchers across disciplines, who used it to document and create knowledge. The advent of the smartphone has made the camera accessible to all strata of society and using the phone camera for recording information, impressions and social situations is a way of life now.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Name some scholars who have worked in the field of digital and applied visual anthropology.

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2. What has made videos popular since the 1980s?

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6.4 VIDEO IN ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

During the past few decades, film making and video recordings have undergone a sea change. Changes in technology have been a major factor in bringing about a change in ethnographic research. In the 1970s, the advent of synchronised sound and light weight cameras brought about a change in the way in which films were made. Digital technology has further changed the way that we do ethnographic research. The way that films are made have also changed due to the lightweight digital cameras and also inbuilt cameras in smart phones. This has proved a boon for social scientists, giving them new ways to record and present data. The advent of digital technology has been a game changer.

Technological development in the 1930s and 1960s led to synchronous cameras and recorders and videos too. Since the 1970s till about 2000s the focus of visual ethnography has been on ethnographic films that were primarily used as a tool for education and television (MacDougall, 2001).

Videos have to be viewed not just a replacement to ethnographic films but a medium with its own dynamics. The advent of the digital video about the size of a cigarette pack and computer editing has made filmmaking cheaper. This has challenged the traditional filmmaking with heavy equipment and large teams. The proliferation of small digital cameras has also meant that people are increasingly using cameras for their own personal interest. The inbuilt cameras in smartphones has given access to the camera to almost everyone.

Check Your Progress 3

1) How has filmmaking changed with technological development?

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2) What has been the impact of digital videos on filmmaking?

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6.5   DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Digital ethnography is also known as cyber ethnography or virtual ethnography. Technological development has changed the way that we live and communicate. Digital technology is an inherent part of culture both material and non-material. You might read this lesson, for instance on digital platform and may watch the films mention by using the links on video. As you can see digital technologies have become an inherent part of our life through which we access many things. We use the term mediation to capture the interface between the individual and media technologies.

Digital technology has also changed ethnographic research. The research process may involve the use of the digital camera, audio recording, use of social media and maybe smartphones. It has changed in the following ways:

- For the researcher using a smartphone for example, it is easy to share the output with the subject almost immediately and to get their feedback.

- Both the researcher and the subject can edit and tag and share it with others almost instantaneously.

- The mode of dissemination is also digital.

- The sharing maybe through podcasts, blogs, websites, public forums of dissemination like YouTube.

- The digital ethnographic approach involves studying people by collaborating with them. The ethnographer deliberately seeks to understand what people are experiencing. The belief is that the subjects are in the best position to relate their own experiences. The collaborative nature of digital ethnography makes it open. The ethnographer creates knowledge with the subject and not as a stand-alone researcher.

- This enables the subject to investigate their own experiences.

- The use of a smartphone for instance can enable the subject to record their lived experiences engaging with environment where they are. It could be something as simple as walking through the street sensing and feeling the cold and the dark that gets recorded through a smart phone.

Digital technology has made possible ethnographic research of a different kind. For example, this may include sensory experiences being recorded by individuals themselves. Another example could be that of a researcher sitting with an individual in self driving cars and video record their driving experience. Unlike traditional ethnography digital ethnography makes it possible for the researcher and the subjects to be in different physical spaces.

Pink (Pink et.al., 2016) believes that ethnographic writing may be replaced by video, photography or blogging. Digital media and practices are a part of the everyday world. It is non-media centric. It has enabled us to capture the sensory aspects of societies and cultures.

6.5.1   Impact on Ethnography

Changes in technology have also had an impact on the that we do ethnography. Visual ethnography has progressed from a positivist approach to a more reflexive

approach. Ethnography has progressed from films where the subject's point of view was rarely included. If it was included then it was filtered through the lens of the ethnographic filmmaker. The voices of the natives were not included and were rarely heard. The belief was that the anthropologist knew the best. The cultural representations of 'other cultures' was through the Western anthropologists'eyes. The development of technology has prompted a change in this. We now see films that include the voices of the subjects. Projects and research are often carried out in collaboration. The researcher/filmmaker is no longer viewed as a powerful entity who is studying other people and cultures. Since the style of filmmaking is more participatory power relations change and the project is more collaborative (MacDougall, 2001;Pink, S., et.al. 2016;Husfeldt, T., 2016).

This has had an impact on ethnographic research in the following ways:

Individual researcher

It is now possible for a single person to make a film much like the anthropologist doing fieldwork. David MacDougall (MacDougall, 2001) an Australian ethnographic filmmaker believes that this has also had an impact on the relationship of the researcher with the subjects. The single individual is perceived as being more vulnerable and exposed and this leads to a more relaxed, informal and spontaneous and humorous relationship between the researcher and the subjects.

Less Intrusive & Greater Flexibility

This research is less intrusive since the equipment is not so cumbersome. Further since the film is made using a digital camera the need for funding for expensive filmmaking equipment is no longer there.

- The constraints put by funding agencies to meet their own agendas are thus not a limiting factor. This has led to a style of filmmaking that is less institutionalised and is more reflexive.

- Since the limitation of expensive equipment like reels and an entire film making crew is not there the project can change as you go along. For example, David MacDougall's Doon School Series began as a study of intersecting cultural diversity in a boarding school but later changed to how boarding schools construct an artificial cultural homogeneity (MacDougall, 2001).

Content of Ethnographic Films

This has also had an impact on the content of the films made. The focus of ethnographic films was on recording specific events like rituals, or to make films for education or to supplement what was already known rather than as new explorations and research. The style of filmmaking was heavily based on interviews about people narrating for instance their experiences. This has also changed since the filmmaker is almost unobtrusive as was seen in the Doon School series by David MacDougall. It is easy to communicate from behind a video camera rather than a film camera. This enabled the students to ignore the presence of the filmmaker.

6.5.2 Some Case Studies as an Illustration of Video Digital Ethnography

Ethnographic research is increasingly becoming application oriented. Digital and video ethnography has been used extensively to understand social issues and to find a way to help those around us. This has entailed the involvement of the ethnographic researcher with other stakeholders. The stakeholders include participants, government officials, politicians, researchers, wider public, academicians and practitioners from other disciplines, industry participants NGOs and others that may be involved. Pink (Pink, et,al., 2017) argues that this mode of 'para' ethnography is important for there to be collaboration with the informants and other stakeholders. The production of knowledge has to be collaborative. For her this means decentring ethnography from a stance of power and of moving it towards a platform that is more reflexive. The use of digital technology has to be understood in terms of its cultural embeddedness.it is a part of the material culture. In this section we will briefly illustrate this through two case studies from the work of Sarah Pink et.al (2016) to demonstrate how digital video ethnography can be used to do research and to disseminate it.

6.5.2.1   Case Study 1: Energy and Digital Living

One of the case studies is on the use of energy in homes. The study was conducted by Pink, et.al. (Pink, S. et.al., 2017). The focus of the study was on energy usage in homes was from the point of view of sustainable development and reduction in energy demand. The project was a part of the government of the United Kingdom to reduce carbon emission. The researchers sought to develop a deeper understanding of the use of energy and media consumption in everyday practices and habits at home. They used the method of sensory ethnography that included video home tours, video re-enactments and recording everyday activity. The householders were involved so as to develop and design a home where a sustainable use of energy was possible. The home is a complex place for sensory, affective and social relations and also material elements that are central to a home.

The research captures the emotions, the expressions, their values and expectations from the digital realm. One part of the project also focussed on the daily 'rhythms; and 'digital practices'. Technologies that they took with them as they moved through their houses and fixed technologies. The people while performing their daily activities verbally described their activities and also showed the researcher through their performances how they went about their everyday routines. These were practices that were generally not shared with others and were not spoken about. The participants while moving through their homes and doing daily chores like cooking, cleaning and getting ready for work demonstrated the use of digital technologies. For instance, phones are charged near the beds, they are used for listening to music, as alarm clocks and is taken everywhere in the house and elsewhere too. The final outcome and the videos were also shared on a website 'The Energy and Digital Living web site' https://energyanddigitalliving.com/.

6.5.2.2   Case Study 2: Laundry Lives

This is a documentary video made by Sarah Pink and Nadia Astari (Pink,S., et.al., 2017). The ethnography was done in Indonesia and Australia. The emphasis was on understanding sustainability, laundry, washing machines and digital media.

The industry partner was Unilever and it was a part of Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan (http://www.unilever.com/sustainable-living/). The study focussed on how laundry was done and also on the people's hopes for future sustainable products and services in terms of sustainable solutions while doing laundry. The film was on how people do their laundry and their viewpoint on a future which was environmentally sustainable. The documentary captures changing gender relations, new technologies and environmental concerns in the domestic sphere. The filming of a mundane chore like doing laundry helps understand complex domestic relations, and the tensions between professional and personal spheres. Navigating everyday life in an environmentally sustainable way. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4UFy3yqsTnpCAkMZOwYz_A

Activity

Visit the Energy and Living website using the hyperlink. Also watch the films Laundry Lives using the hyperlink.

Check Your progress 4

1) Discuss the ways in which digital technology is a part of culture.

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2) How has digital technology changed ethnographic research?

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3) How has the presence of a single ethnographer change the relationship between the researcher and the subjects?

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6.6   ETHICS IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

Emerging ethical issues and risks need to be taken care of in representation through video and film. The very presence of an unfamiliar person in everyday life of a

community that is under research, no matter how close relationships are established, alters the routine. Camera presence alters the way characters act, represent themselves, and communicate. Besides , however natural the settings and the research subjects, care also must be taken to represent them in such a way as to not harm them in anyway.

The question of ethics is not simply about the ethics of the researcher. It demands that the researcher should reflexively be aware of their own beliefs, values and ideas. Ethical decisions taken by the ethnographer are also influenced by the personal beliefs. The final outcome is a result of the extent to which the researcher allows these factors to impinge and influence the research. Pink (Husfeldt, T 2016) contends that the question of ethics and the final decision taken by the researcher has to be resolved at a personal level in terms of their own morality.

6. 6.1 The Issues of Consent

With the proliferation of media particularly digital media the issues and concerns regarding visual research methods have become important. The issue of consent of the informants is very important.

Group Photographs

This is particularly difficult in the case of group photographs since it is difficult to ascertain whether every person in the photograph has given their consent or not. One way out of this is to use photographs taken in public spaces. But then too the researcher should be very careful about excluding those who are not participating from the photograph. In case of a photovoice project in which informants take pictures of their surroundings it becomes difficult to ensure this. The informants may give their consent without really understanding all the implications. Their understanding may differ from the understanding of the researcher. The researcher may not share the entire agenda of the research. It is also difficult to know how the final project whether a photograph or a film may turn out to be after editing etc.

The Dilemma About When to Take Consent

The dilemma that confronts the issue of informed consent is also one in which for example while shooting a film informed consent may be taken but what about consent regarding the final finished film. If the subjects start asserting their rights at all stages of filming then the ethnographer may not be able to finish their project. Even in the case of photographs the final publication may raise moral and legal issues. Once published or released the film or photograph takes a life of its own and is beyond the researcher's control. It thus becomes important to ensure that the researcher carefully considers all options and covers all angles.

Anonymity

In a photograph or a film blurring of the face, putting a black band on the eyes and blurring of the surroundings maybe a way to ensure anonymity. However, it is difficulty to always ensure anonymity. The issue of anonymity and informed consent may vary from situation to situation. The finished product is often not harmful but in some cases it may lead to anxiety and emotional distress. Open ethnography which is collaborative addresses some of these issues.

Covert Shooting

The researcher in a bid to ensure realism and to ensure that they capture reality as it is may use covert cameras. But use of a covert camera without the consent of the informants generally creates ethical issues.

Give and Take Between the Researcher and the Informant

While carrying out research the question of giving back to the respondents often arises. The researcher after completing the research, gains in terms of a publication, a PhD thesis or a finished project. The informant may feel exploited in terms of their gain from the research. Pink (Pink, S. et. al., 2017) (Husefeldt, T. 2016) suggests that the best way out is to undertake an ethnography that is less exploitative. Ethnographic research is a process of collaboration and should be based on the idea of a shared agency between the parties concerned. It should not be a hierarchical unequal relationship. Sometimes the research may take on an autobiographical element along with the research narrative both temporally and spatially. It may be a part of the everyday lived experiences of the researcher and researched. The final material can be jointly owned as was seen in the case of the two case studies discussed in the earlier sections.

6.7   LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the way that representations of society have changed with the change in technology. Visual representation began in the form of posed photographs and ethnographic films made of 'other' people. These were primarily made as a tool for education. With the advent of digital technology and smart phones the manner of doing research has changed to a more collaborative one. Research is now done with the collaboration of the stakeholders. The dissemination of the research findings too is now not just through printed books and articles but also through websites, podcasts and blogs etc. All research should be done in an ethical manner without harming anyone.

6.8   REFERENCES

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6.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) While traditionally films involve high costs and cannot be easily made by everyone, videography is easier and more convenient, and home videos as well as professionally produced ones have become part and parcel of our lives.

2) Alfred Cort Haddon, Franz Boas, Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen used the visual method for research.

3) The equipment was expensive and the cost of running and maintaining the cameras was also high. Repairs were also not easily available and spare parts too were expensive. The reels that were used in the cameras was also costly. A typical ethnographic film making expedition in addition to the anthropologist involved a large team including a cameraman, sound recordist and other technicians. It was never a single person expedition. This added to the cost of the entire research process. The high cost of the entire process also meant that there had to be minimal wastage of reel and time spent.

4) Haptic cinema' i.e. cinema through which the viewer touches and feels the images.

5) From the 1940s to the 1980s the focus was on the anthropologist creating an 'image' of the society based on their writings. This led to a decline of the visual methods of representing society.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Sarah Pink, Marcus Banks, Andy Lawrence, Stephen Hughes, Christopher Pinney, Paulo Faveroare some of the important scholars in the field of digital ethnography and applied visual anthropology.

2) Since the 1980s, when the video made an appearance, its simplicity, convenience durability and cost effectiveness have made it popular with researchers.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Technological development in the 1930s and 1960s led to synchronous cameras and recorders and videos too. In the 1970s, the advent of synchronised sound and light weight cameras brought about a change in the way in which films were made. Digital technology has further changed the way that we do ethnographic research. The way that films are made have also changed due to the lightweight digital cameras and also inbuilt cameras in smart phones.

2) The advent of the digital video about the size of a cigarette pack and computer editing has made filmmaking cheaper. This has challenged the traditional filmmaking with heavy equipment and large teams.

Check Your Progress 4

1) Digital technology is an inherent part of culture both material and non-material. For instance, we write and communicate in a digital mode using a laptop and a printer. We use emails to communicate using wi-fi or data packs.

2) Digital technology has changed ethnographic research since the research process may involve the use of the digital camera, audio recording, use of social media and maybe smartphones.

3) The single individual is perceived as being more vulnerable and exposed and this leads to a more relaxed, informal and spontaneous and humorous relationship between the researcher and the subjects.

UNIT 7 FILM AND VIDEO AS RESEARCH TOOL*

Structure

7.0 Objectives

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Visual Strand in Sociology and Anthropology

    7.2.1 Anthropology's Interest in Visuals

    7.2.2 Sociology's Interest in Visuals

7.3 Films and Videos as Research Tools

    7.3.1 Difference Between Film and Video

    7.3.2 Advantage of Videos Based Research

7.4 Ethical Dilemmas and Methodological Concerns

    7.4.1 Building Trust and Establishing Consent

    7.4.2 Value of Research Design

7.5 Let Us Sum Up

7.6 References

7.7 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you should be able to:

- Explain the relationship of audio/visual technology with the discipline of Sociology and Anthropology.

- Note the advantages of video recording in ethnographic research.

- Narrate the reflexive and collaborative approach to video-based research

- Discuss the significance of research design for video-based research

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we take a look at the place of visuals in the discipline of sociology and social anthropology, to begin with. The camera was often used as an extension of the human eye and was used along with tradition of observational approach. What was observed in 'other culture' was not only documented as field notes in journals but also photographed, thus making visual recordings a small part of the larger anthropological text. The concern for us, here, is not so much about the history of this recording technology but its *use* by the researcher. That is, what purpose did it serve for the discipline? We examine various aspects related to this question in our first section.

Following this we are going to explore technical advances in video technology and its impact on ethnographic filmmaking. We will be engaging with question such as, what is the difference between 16 mm film and videotape or digital video? What are the advantages of videotapes and digital record over films?

We also examine the various ethical concerns that emerged in documenting other cultures using the camera. The ethical concerns led to a more self-conscious and reflexivity.

7.2 VISUAL STRANDS IN SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

From the era of still images, to motion pictures, to videotapes and now digital recordings, visual studies have successively become a central field of enquiry and knowledge production in anthropology and sociology. We need to acknowledge that visual research method is embedded in anthropological and sociological investigation. The 'new normal' is the digital world, and thus research in visual studies holds immense potential today. Scholarly journals such as *Visual Studies, Journal of Visual Culture, Visual Anthropology and Visual Anthropological Review* are some of the journals that are significant in the field of visual ethnography.

7.2.1 Anthropology's Interest in Visuals

The visual strand in ethnographic research can be explored through the rich work of Anthropologist from late nineteenth century to early twentieth century; some of the influential scholars of that time such as Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson and many others carried camera to their field work. Between 1880s and 1920s photographs were seen as a vital form of evidence, capturing the human activity in a particular time and space (Banks and Ruby, 2011). In tune with the tradition of observational approach, the camera was seen as an extension of human eye, showing the reality as it is. What was observed in 'other culture' was not only documented as field notes in journals but also photographed, thus making visual recordings a small part of the larger anthropological text. The concern for us, here, is not so much about the history of this recording technology but its *use* by the researcher. That is, what purpose did it serve for the discipline? To understand this, we need to examine the relation of visuals to anthropological practice.

Guided by the positivistic approach, the traditional uses of visual methods, such as photography and research films, were to aid scientific rigor to an anthropological study. Here, the visual method was believed to record human behavior objectively. Just as in natural sciences, data when gathered from field is sent to the lab to test its accuracy and reliability, raw film footage and photographs were sent to studio (labs) to develop final proof of that captured human activity in time and space. This data is then expressed in terms of theory that can be reproduced and redefined by other scholars as well. This imparts an essence of permanency to visual records. The main purpose of it was to be shared with the community of scholars—those who were not present in the field̄ anthropologist's adventurous work and study of 'exotic culture'. These were then discussed, analysed and opened the possibility of interpretation. The aim of the visual record then was limited to research and effective classroom teaching (Asch and Asch, 1995).

Box 1: Kinesis

In 1950s, inspired by Margaret Mead, American anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell developed a method, known as *kinescis* to study non-verbal aspects of communication, such as body gestures, facial expressions, etc. He believed body movements were culturally defined and shaped rather than being universal. In order to explore the cultural basis of these body rhythms, visual methods were seen as a significant recording tool.

Watch his research film *Microcultural Incidents in Ten Zoos* (1971), exploring the meaning of various body movements across different cultures: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0IpQdQcyuU

Margaret Mead who defined anthropology as the 'discipline of word' (Mead, 1995) found the use of camera as a recording tool for 'objective' data collection. There was a scientific interest in audio and visuals, where the concern of camera was limited to record material culture, technology and human physiology. Camera in this scenario held an immense potentiality to record sensory aspect of social life that eluded the scientific text. Visual method was able to capture non-linguistic dimension of communication, body movement, and rhythmic cycle of ritual, which were all visually very appealing.

If one observes the earlier forms of ethnographic films in anthropology, the visual element of research was dependent on narration and text. On its own the visual component of an ethnographic research was unable to provide a context of the phenomena under study. Soundtracks, voice over narration, written texts were manually synchronised into the film footage. Thus, the primary role of visual was to supplement the text with observed facts, not to replace its authority. Medium was not the message here, rather an aid to record observation.

According to documentary filmmaker and visual anthropologist David MacDougall (2011), the strength of visuals resides in details and its interpretation can take place independently without the narration of the filmmaker. He argues that while viewing the film, we come closer   to the sensorial experience of the anthropologist in the field; this is different from reading an anthropological text, where most of the details are left to the reader's imagination. Therefore, according to him, 'it is this materialist basis of film (sensory engagement, experience, emotions etc.) that stands in sharp contrast to the verbal codes of written anthropology' (MacDougall, 2011:100). With the technical advances in 1960, synchronous-sound based films emerged; this reduced cost of production of filmmaking, as the manual synchronisation of dialogues into the videos was not only time consuming but also expensive.

The era of 60s, also saw the observational-participatory approach of recording accompanied by 'collaborative' approach. *Chronicles of Summer* (1961) produced by anthropologist Jean Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin is a classic example of what Rouch defined as 'shared anthropology'. With the camera out there in the street of Paris, this film involved its participants as the part of the process of filmmaking from the beginning to its end. Rouch discussed the idea of his films with his participants, collaborated with them, watched the footage with them, and took their active response as well. This work was 'reflexive' in nature as it showed the lives of urban Parisian from their point of view. Here the role of camera was more than just a 'fly-on-the-wall'. It in fact, transited from merely

being a recording tool to a medium of expressing individuals' agency and their subjective experiences.

Activity 1

Watch these ethnographic videos before the advent of synchronous sound track and videotapes.

Observe how anthropological filmmakers' integrated text images and sound to contextualise human activities. Do pay specific attention to sociological categories narrated in these video clips:

Watch Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson's (1940): *Bathing Babies in Three Culture*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmvqdDBSY0k

Watch Karl Heider's *Dani Sweet Potatoes (1974):*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15zYGpvnRfY&t=6s

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The debates of 1980s and 1990s around video records were polarised around two perspectives:

- Are the visuals an objective record?

- Or were they an artistic expression of the researcher?

According to Sarah Pink (2013), ethnographic knowledge is better understood as originating from fieldwork experience. She argues that ethnographic research footage is more of a subjective representation of fieldwork than being just an 'objectively' recorded data (Pink 2013).According to MacDougall (2011), anthropological filmmaking now is more concerned with the 'non-visual' rather than the visual, meaning that it has become a 'means of exploring the full gamut of human social experience, including ideas, feelings, verbal and non-verbal expression, aesthetics, the role of the senses, and the formal and informal interaction of everyday life' (MacDougall, 2011: 100).

Activity 2

Watch *Chronicles of Summer* and observe the kind of camera and microphone used.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ct-49TYmzMg&t=188s

7.2.2 Sociology's Interest in Visuals

Interestingly, both sociology and camera are the creation of modernity and their arrival too shares a similar time period. However, visuals were not a part of sociological mode of enquiry, at least for a century. The history of visual method in the discipline of sociology is still emerging, though what is clear is that its founding fathers didn't make use of visual records such as still images or films. American sociologist Douglas Harper (1988) had once said that Durkheim's concept of suicide rates in modern societies evoked *images* of societies in his mind. Thus, indicating that written texts can lead us to imagine things, though in an abstract form. Images, on the other hand, gives us concrete details of various forms of human activity and behavior (Harper, 1988).

From 1920s to the 1960s, there was no visual sociology in United States of America and in Europe. Sociological mode of enquiry in post war American society was dominated by survey method and statistical analysis. It was not until the 1960s, that visual research began to emerge. The radical movements of 1960s, such as the civil rights movement and women's movement, had an impact on the methods of research. These social movements were extensively photographed. It will be fair to note, that an engagement with aspect of visual communication was attempted in the ethnomethodological work of Sociologists such as Harold Garfinkel(1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology* and Ervin Goffman (1976) *Gender Advertisement*.

Photographs and videotapes were seen as an empirical record of the researcher's observation, which could be revisited again for analysis and comparisons for analysing changes in society. Documentary tradition of photography influenced visual research in sociology. Howard Becker (1974) *Photography and Sociology* was one of the first to introduce visual sociology. Becker combined the sociological theories with documentary photography. Jon Wagner (1979) *Images of Information* is invaluable as it brought into play various techniques to engage with images as a social enquiry. Photographs by then were used for understanding and cataloguing cultures. Douglas Harper's (2001) *Changing Works: Visions of a Lost Agriculture* has photographed the social interaction between people and their changing relationship with dairy farming. He argues that 'not all sociological data can be photographed but in studies of social interaction, body movement the camera can gather information that cannot be gathered with the human eye or other recording devices' (Harper, 1988: 62).

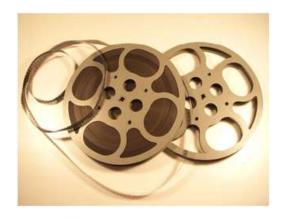Harper argues that there were two dominant approaches to visual sociology

a) Visual method, i.e., making used of recording technology

b) Visual communication, i.e., ways to analyse and interpret photographs taken by others.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Discuss anthropology and sociology's interest in visuals?

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2) Explain Jean Rouch's reflexive style of film making.

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7.3   FILM AND VIDEO AS RESEARCH TOOL

In this section we are going to explore technical advances in video technology and its impact on ethnographic filmmaking. We will be engaging with question such as, what is the difference between 16 mm film and videotape or digital video? What are the advantages of videotapes and digital record over films?

16mm film.

(Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:16mm_filmhjul.jpg)

7.2.3   Difference Between Film and Videotape

Till 1970s, 16 mm film dominated ethnographic film production. Before the advent of sound to video technology, a separate audio recorder, tripod and huge motion picture cameras were carried to the field. Often anthropologists would be accompanied by the trained camera crew members to handle the entire set up.

A reel of 2" Quadruplex (aka 2" Quad) videotape dating from the mid-1970s, compared with a modern-day mini DV digital videocassette for size comparison

(Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2inch_Quad_Tape_Reel_with_miniDV_cassette.jp)

Videotapes marked its entry into anthropological film in 1980s; Videotape technology such as Camcorder or Handy Cam resolved the challenge of manual synchronisation of sound to the films. Not only were they easy to handle, but also economically less taxing. This removed the dependency of some anthropologists on trained profession camera crew.

One of the earliest videotape-based camcorder

(**Source:** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Camcorder #/media/File:RCA_VHS_shoulder-mount_ Camcorder_ (lighter_filter_NR_etc).jpg)

Cannon's first AVCHD (Advance Video Coding High Definition) Camcorder Credit: Nebrot

(**Source:** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Camcorder#/media/File:Canon_ HF10_ front.jpg)

We are looking at the difference between these video technologies from the point of view of its *use* by filmmakers in anthropology and sociology. Compared to videotapes such as VHS, 16 mm film and the film-based production were an expensive activity. We have discussed the advantages of technologically advanced light weight cameras in Unit 6 on Representing Through Video and Film. Ethnographic films have come far from analog videos to digital, with the successive technical advancement. What we are seeing today, is an impressive moment, where more and more people are being encouraged to make use of their smart-phones for video recording. In a way, this technical advance has been inclusive, interactive and participatory in nature.

Making use of Smartphone to make films.

(**Source:** https://nofilmschool.com/get-your-smartphone-ready-make-films)

7.3.2 Advantages of Videos in Research

Films and Videos as a research tool aids in representing another people's experience. The objective of films and videos in ethnographic research has always

been to develop a better understanding of society and culture. Keeping in mind the discipline's history in visual interest and contemporary context, let's look at the advantages of them.

According to Joseph H. Schaeffer, who extensively used videotapes in his research, there are three main advantages of videotape in fieldwork:

a) Video records as primary data,

b) Video records provide reliability and accuracy to data

c) Video records expand scope for interpretation; since what's been recorded can be shared with wider community of scholars, video records provide a space for intersubjective reliability (Schaeffer, 1995: 256).

In comparing the role of videos to photographs, American Anthropologist John Collier Jr., argued that films have an upper hand than photographs. Photographs freeze the time and space in which that particular human activity is taking place. In a way, the context of that activity may become alluding to audience but videos record a definitive measure of time in an un-interrupted flow and because of this incessant 'time-flow' videos are able to establish the pace of how the day begins and ends. 'Film shows *how* people interact with their environment and culture' (Collier 1995).

Video coverage is not limited relatively to what has been shot in a photograph and therefore is able to provide a context to the social phenomena. There is also a scientific interest in video records; they are seen as an objective and accurate data. Thus, videos as a research tool aid an analysis of a particular cultural form. Their interests lie in capturing a precise relation between individual with their environment. The video records permits precise and detail comprehension of human activity. It also provides us a window of opportunity to observe the relationship between the researcher and his/her informants.

Visual tools have recorded a society or community's '*way of life*' which is available for future study purpose. Given, that the modern society is undergoing a fast pace change, videos' potential rest in a comparative research, to map the historical transformation of societies. Anthropologists and Sociologist are known to make use of their visual records of field for an effective classroom teaching, reminding us the significant use of visual for educational purpose. Since the subject matter of sociology and social anthropology is the study of a change in the social conditions of society across different time, videos can provide a wider scope of understanding that no other method can. The function of the video tool is to immortalise space and time; these can be then used to analyse *change* of by comparing and re-video recording human relationship with their surroundings.

As discussed before, that with the technical advances by 1990, many sociologists and anthropologist were making use of cameras and camcorder in their research. The reflexive turn of that era made sociologists and anthropologist explore ways to incorporate videos in their ethnographic work. By then ethnographic videos were seen more than an objective record; they were seen as creating an ethnographic knowledge which was born out of the negotiation, participation and collaboration with their research participants. One can not discredit the local knowledge and culture around the use of video technology in the contemporary times. Many young researchers and students are now being encouraged to make use of visual in their studies, thus we see sociological and anthropological research getting more and more embedded into visual method.

Activity 3

Read about these short video ethnographies to explore the use of camera in the field and participants response to the process of filming:

1) Kwame Braun's *Passing girl; riverside: An essay on camera work*

   https://kwamebraun.com/passing-girl-riverside

   Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usXQ3waKqr0

2) Sociological study on midwives by Lomax and Casey (1998) *Recording Social Life: Reflexivity and Video Methodology*

   https://www.socresonline.org.uk/3/2/1.html

Observe the relationship between the filmmaker and participants here; do you find it different than as the *observer* and the *observed*?

Check Your Progress 2

1) Write a short note on the technical advances made in the ethnographic filmmaking?

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2) List the advantages of video as a research tool in anthropology and sociology

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7.4 ETHICAL DILEMMAS AND METHODOLOGICAL CONCERN

In this section we will discuss some of the ethical concerns when recording cultures and their people. Some of these concerns were discussed in our unit 6, we do however continue with that discussion with reference to use of film in sociological and anthropological research.

7.4.1 Building Trust and Establishing Consent

Ethnographic study and its method of participant observation rests on the foundation of trust-based rapport between the researcher and his/her participants. Trust is a crucial factor here, as the participants will only share their home (field) and private matter in utmost confidence when their privacy is respected and confidentiality to their private information is guaranteed. These are important concerns while doing research. We have discussed the issue of consent in Unit 6.

Questions such as should the equipment be concealed, or removed at their request becomes significant in rapport building. Joseph H. Schaeffer advises that in order to maintain complete anonymity of research participants and the use of field data, a legal contract/agreement or financial remuneration should be drafted (Schaeffer, 1995: 272). This is done in the faith of not misusing the data against the best wishes of the participants and also to take responsibility of it's any unforeseen implication in future

Similarly, maintaining a contact with the field participants, even when not conducting any field work can aid in building trust. The researcher's relationship doesn't end with the completion of video coverage. Joseph Schaeffer advises that upon completion, post coverage contact must be initiated. Many of his participants, after the completion of filming, indicated that they found the camera had become a 'part of the furniture' during the extended period of coverage (Schaeffer, 1995: 262). Timothy Asch too reminded us that, 'Value of films lies in the feedback. It is the most significant contribution films could make to ethnographic research' (Asch and Asch, 1995). Since the turn of reflexivity, the ethnographic research has been oriented towards a collaborative approach. Therefore, it is sanctimonious to show people reaction to their own videos and also to observe their responses.

7.4.2 Value of Research Design

Using films and videos as research tools requires reasoning with planning, analyses and purpose. Visual research method may not be appropriate in all the social situation, its applicability is determined by the social context. Therefore, a research design is always useful to evaluate appropriateness of video technology. Some of them are:

1) Planning: In order to test the appropriateness of visual tools for research spend sufficient time in the field. Utilise this time to identify what aspect of the field and participant's lives can be video recorded. Do a recce to mark sites or corners that will be suitable for camera placement so to film from a particular angle.

2) Analyse what all can be accomplished by using audio-video tool in one's research. Are there aspects of study that can be recorded through other techniques? This will help to rationalise one's purpose of using the video tool.

3) Interview the participants before introducing the camera to the site. There are some cultures that don't allow visual coverage of behavior and their everyday life practices. In those moments, the researcher has to respect the privacy and boundaries of the community and its participants.

4) Similarly explore the physical environment, such as the frequency of electricity, presence of a repair shop, before considering the use of video tool. Always keep enough back up options, such an extra lens, batteries, power bank, external hard drive, etc.

5) Take a formal/informal permission from the higher authority for video-based research.

6) Asking the participants of the study to sign a consent form. This is obligatory to maintain their privacy and anonymity.

7) Lastly, share the video footage with the participants and incorporate their feedback in the process of creating final work.

Box 2: The Video Ethnographic Experiences: Pink And Hastrup

In her video-ethnography on the idea of '*sensory home*', Sarah Pink explored the question, what do people do in their everyday life to make their domestic space comfortable for themselves? The study was done in England and Spain from 1990 2000; Pink interviewed forty men and women, these were tape-recorded 'exploring identity and lifestyle, followed by a video tour of each home' (Pink, 2003:47) .She stayed in touch with her informants, made additional visits, and sometimes stayed at their home as well.

Pink too had prepared a research design with her anthropological objective. She structured her interviews for one hour, making a conscious use of the technology within that restricted time 'to explore and represent each informant's home…' (Page 55). All this while she was observing and appreciating their agencies, in terms of what kind of risk, choice and emotions went into building a comfortable space.

One may recall the experience of anthropologist Kristen Hastrup's attending of an Icelandic cultural event known as *Ram Exhibition*. 'The ram exhibition is a feast celebrating the successfully recovery of the sheep and, as a matter of consequence, celebrating maleness' (Hastrup 1992). Hastrup's curiosity took her to this remarkable event, which she attempted to photograph using her camera from the periphery. She did express discomfort as being the only woman present in the exhibition which in her own words, 'was literally and metaphorically a competition of sexual potency', Hastrup described her pictures as hopeless; they were 'ill focused, badly lit, lopsided and showing nothing but uninteresting backs of men and ram. While I was taking them, I had the impression that I was making an almost pornographic record of a secret ritual' (Pg. 9). She emphatically articulated her difference in what she experienced and what the pictures turned out to be, indicating how the visual method in this particular case didn't support her research objective. According to her, the pictures, '… showed me nothing of the sort but bore the marks of my own inhibition, resulting from my transgression of the boundary between gender categories' (Hastrup, 1993: 9)

Check Your Progress 3

1) Discuss the ethical dilemma associated with using video as a research tool

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2) What is the value of Research Design in video- based research?

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7.5   LET US SUM UP

The significance of visual research method in Anthropology and Sociology rests on its *use* of the visual records. From a scientific interest in videos, as an objective data, to videos as an expression of ethnographic knowledge, we studied that video-based research have undergone changes with the technical advancement. This has also redefined the relationship between the researcher and research participants. The critical and reflexive turn in sociology and anthropology along with its major debates of 1980s- 1990s, contributed to these transformations in video-based research. Video-based research has its own ethical dilemma and methodological concerns. Therefore, a research design becomes necessary to address the issues related with video-based research.

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7.7   SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1)   With the advent of audio/visual technology, Anthropology and Sociology have developed an interest in the visual dimension of their research. Traditionally photographs and films, were believed to record human behavior

objectively. The main purpose of this was to share knowledge with fellow academicians. These were then discussed, analysed and opened the possibility of interpretation. Later reflexivity in the use of the visual technique modified ethnographic research.

2) The reflexive approach was revolutionised by Jean Rouch in anthropological filmmaking. With the technique of handheld camera, Rouch would follow the movements of his subjects closely, thus establishing a direct relationship with them.

Check Your Progress 2

1) 1.Video based research such as ethnographic films in Anthropology were dominated by 16 mm film till 1970s. These film-based camera lacked an inbuilt audio recording device, making one to do a manual synchronisation of sound or dialogues to the film. Before the advent of audio- based video technology, background music, commentary or voice over narration were added manually to the films, giving an impression that on its own these visuals lack a certain context. Early filming expeditions used large and heavy cameras and expensive reels. This underwent a change, with the advent of videotape and camcorders. Sound was now inbuilt and cameras were lightweight. They also did not obscure the face of the film maker. Instant playback facilities facilitated discussion and participation of the subjects in the entire filming process.

2) The objective of films and videos in ethnographic research has always been to develop a better understanding of society and culture. The main advantages of video records are:

    a) Video records primary data

    b) Video records provide reliability and accuracy of data

    c) Video records expand scope for interpretation.

    d) The function of the video tool is to immortalise space and time; these can be then used to analyse*change* of by comparing and re-video recording human relationship with their surroundings.

Check Your Progress 3

1) The deployment of video tools in the field comes with its own ethical conundrum; the tool may get register as an intrusion to participant's privacy. Since the video technology becomes a medium of representation, it the researcher may run the risk of misrepresentation of their participant's lives. Therefore, establishing trust becomes first and foremost concern in video-based research. Therefore, researchers are always advised to spend enough time in the field to familiarise themselves with the research participants. It's equally important to discuss research plan, including the purpose of video recording with the participants; it's obligatory on the part of researcher to take their consent before beginning with video recording. By doing so, they give research participants a sense of control over their information. Thus questions such as should the equipment be concealed, or removed at their request becomes significant in rapport building.

2) Visual research method such as the video tools may not be appropriate in all social situations; since its applicability is determined by the social context it is always advice to prepare a research design before one begins with video recording. The purpose of research design is to rationalise three reasons: a) what phenomena to be video recorded, b) Can the phenomena be recorded through any other technique or method, c) the purpose of video recording the social phenomena or human activity.