Profession, passion, or play?
Attitudes to unpaid work in the film and TV industries

6th July 2016

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University of Northumbria
Introductions

- Former TV documentary producer/director; worked in TV for 15 years
- Ran online community ‘TV Freelancers’ with about 9,000 members
- TV WRAP campaign in 2005 against illegal employment practice
- Joined Northumbria’s media department in Jan 2007
TV vs film reception of anti-unpaid work campaigning

Introductions

- TV Wrap campaign in 2005 helped to raise awareness and influence policy in the TV industry regarding unpaid work
- **Switched focus from TV to the independent low-budget film industry**
- Different response from independent film community – different funding models, different production culture and a different response to the campaign
The research question
TV vs film reception of anti-unpaid work campaigning

Is this simply a difference in culture between the 2 industries – or can we map differences in moral attitudes more precisely?
Online survey
The research question

- Online survey – 1,100 respondents
- Self-selecting sample accessed via variety of online networks and mailing lists: unions, online communities, guilds, job sites, screen agencies, film festivals, indie film sites
- 557 respondents from TV, 148 from film, 314 ‘both’
- Range of questions to build up a profile, then a number of ethical agree/disagree statements about unpaid work
### Profiles of respondents

**Online survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profiles of respondents</th>
<th>TV</th>
<th>Film</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working mostly on commercially funded productions?</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you ever engage people on an unpaid basis?</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever worked unpaid?</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age – average</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual income – average</td>
<td>41.7K</td>
<td>24K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freelance/self-employed/casually employed</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income from sector forms more than 80% of personal income</td>
<td>79.6%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Differences in film and TV sectors
Profiles of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Whole %</th>
<th>TV %</th>
<th>Film %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'I believe that asking someone to work for free is morally wrong'</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'I believe in the individual's right to choose to work for free'</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'The morality of unpaid work depends on the budget available'</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'I would not take part in any form of illegal employment practice'</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'For me, working for free was (or is) the only entry route available'</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Unpaid work is a good selection mechanism for industry entry'</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Differences in film and TV sectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words which describe unpaid work</th>
<th>Whole %</th>
<th>TV %</th>
<th>Film %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacts</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unethical</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Factors correlating to ethical attitude
Differences in film and TV sectors

Film sector was consistently more positive about unpaid work
...but there were other factors that mapped onto moral attitudes even more closely.

Correlations between anti-unpaid work position, and:

- Higher budget, fully funded production models
- Older and more experienced
- Being freelance or an employee as opposed to an employer
- Higher personal income
- Union connection
- Better legal awareness
Funding models
Factors correlating to ethical attitude

Funding model vs anti unpaid work statements

- In principle, I believe that asking someone to work for free is morally wrong
- The law takes precedence over all other considerations - I would not take part in any form of illegal employment practice
- The industry I work in can sustain production without depending on unpaid workers
- Productions should not be made without a big enough budget to pay all the crew they need

Commercial funded, paid crew
Non- or partially funded productions, some paid crew or deferred payment
Unpaid crew with intention of future income
Unpaid crew with no financial motivation

Agreement
Funding models

Funding model vs pro unpaid work statements

- Green line: 'The morality of unpaid work depends entirely on the budget available to the production'
- Pink line: 'I believe in the individual's right to choose to work for free'
- Orange line: 'The industry I work in would not function without people working for free'
- Blue line: 'Unpaid work is a good selection mechanism for entry to the industry, as it filters out the less dedicated'

Agreement 1-10

- Commercial funded, paid crew
- Non- or partially funded productions, some paid crew or deferred payment
- Unpaid crew with intention of future income
- Unpaid crew with no financial motivation

Profession, passion or play?

Slide 11 of 19
Funding models

Funding model vs 'only way in'

- 'For me, working for free was (or is) the only route available to enter the industry'
Funding models

Funding model vs negative word choice

- Commercial funded, paid crew
- Non/partially funded, some paid crew / deferment
- Unpaid crew, intention of future income
- Unpaid crew with no financial motivation

Percentage ticked

- Exploitative
- Unregulated
- Promoting inequality
- Unethical

Profession, passion or play?
Funding models

Funding model vs positive word choice

Percentage ticked

- Beneficial
- Only way in
- Foot in the door
- Learning experience
- Networking
- Contacts

Commercial funded, paid crew
Non/partially funded, some paid crew, deferment
Unpaid crew, intention of future income
Unpaid crew with no financial motivation

Profession, passion or play?
Levels of experience

Experience vs anti unpaid work statements

- exp 0-2 years
- exp 3-5 years
- exp 6-10 years
- exp 11-20 years
- exp 21-30 years
- exp 31-40 years
- exp >40 years

& variation from sample average

- no illegal employ. practice
- work for free morally wrong
- Prods should pay whole crew
- Unethical
- Exploitative

Profession, passion or play?
Levels of experience

Experience vs pro-unpaid work statements

% variation from sample average

exp 0-2 years  exp 3-5 years  exp 6-10 years  exp 11-20 years  exp 21-30 years  exp 31-40 years  exp >40 years

-25 -20 -15 -10 -5 0 5 10 15 20 25

Beneficial
Industry wouldn't function without UW
Min. wage law no deterrent
Learning experience
Networking

Profession, passion or play?

Slide 16 of 19
Levels of experience

Experience vs inevitability (trend over time?)

% variation from sample average

exp 0-2 years  exp 3-5 years  exp 6-10 years  exp 11-20 years  exp 21-30 years  exp 31-40 years  exp >40 years

Only route available
Inevitable
Necessary
Expensive
Ever worked unpaid
More exploration of the unpaid category  
Levels of experience

Motivation for working unpaid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation for working unpaid</th>
<th>Commercially fully funded</th>
<th>Partial or non-funded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would be prepared to work for free:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a good cause</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve chances of paid work</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve CV or work at higher grade</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To support a project I believed in creatively</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To work with a big name or company</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To develop new skills</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other observations
More exploration of the unpaid category

• All those with unpaid worker models, and those with less than 5 years experience, feel more strongly that **ethics is dependent on budget**
• Yet workers (esp. film) also clearly articulated benefits of unpaid work
• > 90% who engage others unpaid, have also worked unpaid themselves
• Key finding: strong agreement that **fairness within productions** is a very strong driver across the board
• ‘Collective action can bring about change in working practices within the industry’ - strong 7.5 average agreement – also little variation
• Need more statistical data about what is actually happening at entry level – as opposed to anecdotal
Questions

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