

# Multimedia storytelling

*Multimedia is a powerful storytelling tool, says Rich Beckman, but is it an appropriate one for Africa?*

When assessing the appropriateness of a new medium, the audience is the most important consideration. But, there is a new definition of audience with multimedia:

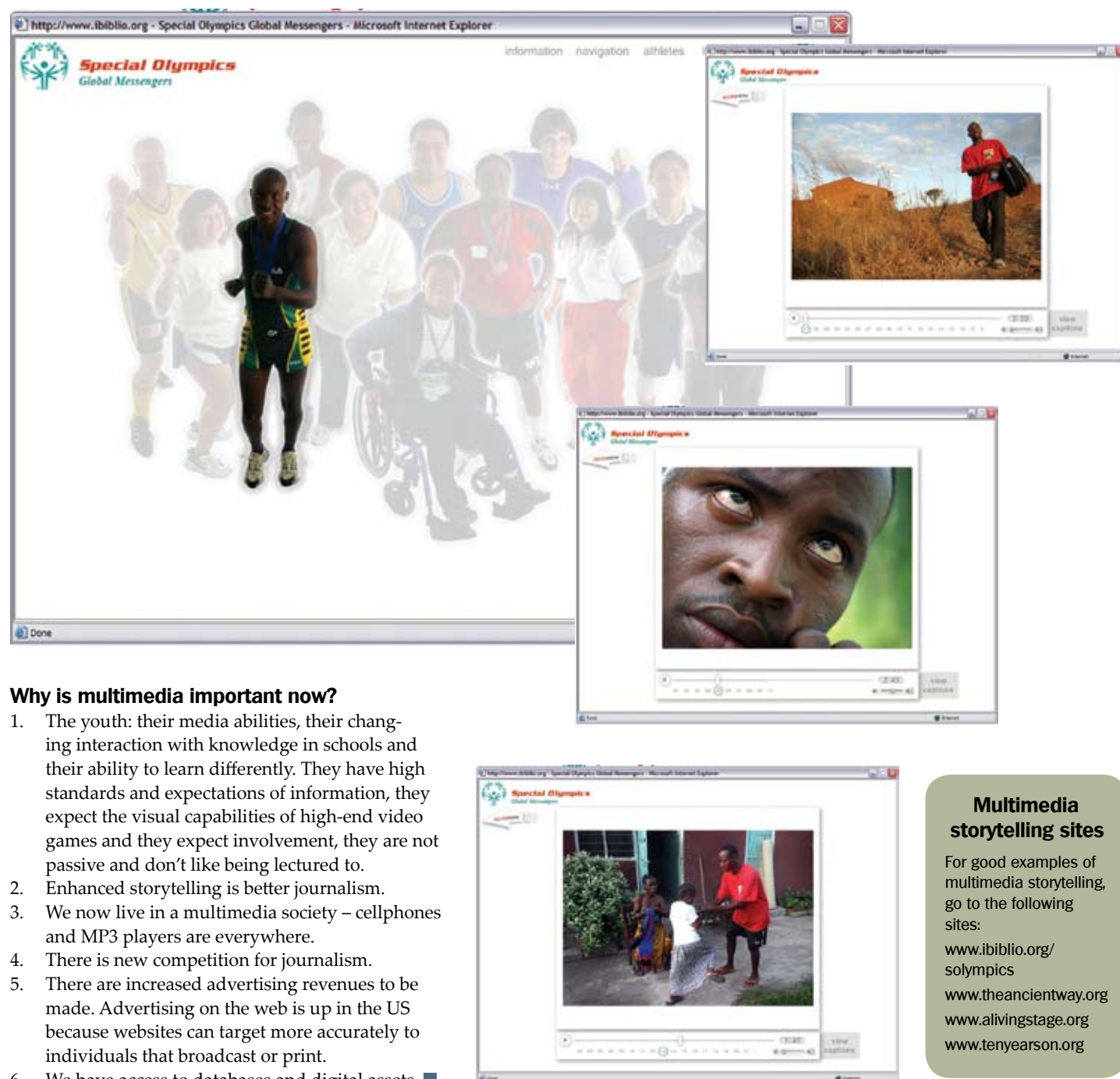
- The audience is anywhere, everywhere.
- A local audience might not be able to access the site, but there is an audience who can, and you should decide whether that audience is important.
- Consider: in the US the news on Africa is not sourced from the perspective of those who live in Africa and have grown up with the story. It is a better story if told by those who live in Africa. Therefore, the need and ability to report over-shadows the need to be reported on.
- Also consider: the people online in Africa are the children, via their schools. And because they are becoming web literate the way to reach that audience is through multimedia.

## What is multimedia?

It consists of several interwoven components:

- Text – concise and descriptive
- Audio – gives a sense of person and place, memories and dreams
- Photography – captures decisive moments
- Video – motion, sequencing, scene-setting, sense of reality
- Animated graphics – to simplify the complex
- Design – a logical ordering of content
- Interactivity – participatory methods to engage the reader

Using the best storytelling tool for each aspect of a story will convey more content, provide better context, create a more personal experience and improve understanding and retention.



## Why is multimedia important now?

1. The youth: their media abilities, their changing interaction with knowledge in schools and their ability to learn differently. They have high standards and expectations of information, they expect the visual capabilities of high-end video games and they expect involvement, they are not passive and don't like being lectured to.
2. Enhanced storytelling is better journalism.
3. We now live in a multimedia society – cellphones and MP3 players are everywhere.
4. There is new competition for journalism.
5. There are increased advertising revenues to be made. Advertising on the web is up in the US because websites can target more accurately to individuals that broadcast or print.
6. We have access to databases and digital assets. ■

## Multimedia storytelling sites

For good examples of multimedia storytelling, go to the following sites:

[www.ibiblio.org/solympics](http://www.ibiblio.org/solympics)  
[www.theancientway.org](http://www.theancientway.org)  
[www.alivingstage.org](http://www.alivingstage.org)  
[www.tenyearson.org](http://www.tenyearson.org)

# Journalism in the argument culture

by Lars Nord

In our research on media policy we have started to investigate the rise of “interpretative journalism” – argumentative journalism with a lack of transparency (ie: these items are not necessarily marked as containing opinion), a lack of proportion and sometimes even a lack of credibility (especially when they make predictions)..

The research questions we asked were:

- Why is “interpretative journalism” increasing?
- What does it mean to public discourse and the quality of democracy?
- Is it reasonable to label this as “journalism”?

## Between news and views

Journalism can be both informative and interpretative. Both information and interpretation are essential for citizens in a democracy. There are broadly-accepted definitions of news journalism and opinion journalism; but few definitions of news analysis and news commentaries exist and these can appear with news information in one article.

## The demand

This kind of journalism is on the rise because the 24-hour news cycle increases demand for copy and as a result the “news hole” gets bigger. The media environment is now very competitive and there are limited resources to meet this demand.

In explaining the rise in this kind of jour-

nalism two journalists gave these comments:

News analysis is some kind of commentary; it is not a news article. There is often no intention to balance different views or actors. It is a kind of opinion piece and it should basically be an orientation map for the reader, according to a political journalist on the Swedish tabloid *Aftonbladet*.

The purpose is above all to help people understand politics. Politics is perceived by the public to be boring and hard to understand. If you can use news analysis to simplify and explain politics in a more personal way what is happening and why, then people may realise that politics is not so difficult to understand, said a political journalist on the tabloid *Expressen*.

The problems are with an “interpretative

journalism” that has a lack of transparency, proportion, and credibility, and especially when it feeds into the “argument culture”.

## Avoiding pseudo-journalism

Opinion, interpretation and analysis should be carefully labelled and edited. There should be open declarations of policy by media houses. Journalists should admit their mistakes and false predictions. A more deliberative tone (rather than an argumentative tone) is needed in analysis and commentary.

## Conclusion

Democracy needs both observers and oracles. Democracy needs accurate journalistic standards for journalists trying to be in both categories at the same time.