New guidelines for broadcasters on user-generated content

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For the first time guidelines are to be published on how broadcasters around the world can encourage audiences to produce better quality user-generated content and to improve media and information literacy.

The new guidelines will also enable the public to become more media and information literate.

Abdul Waheed Khan, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, UNESCO said of the guidelines launched today: "UNESCO and CBA joined forces to encourage broadcasters, particularly from the developing countries, to interact with their viewers and listeners to enhance the quality of the User-Generated Content (UGC) through improved Media and Information Literacy (MIL) of their audiences and, more specifically, UGC producers".

The guidelines, suggested and funded by UNESCO and commissioned by the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA), provide guidance on how to encourage a greater diversity of material from a wider range of voices - material that serves both the public duty and commercial needs of broadcasters and the viewing and democratic needs of the audience. Written by Martin Scott, lecturer in media and development at the University of East Anglia, the report follows research published last year by UNESCO and CBA which found a lack of initiatives by broadcasters to promote user-generated content (UGC) and media and information literacy.

Rapid advances in technology mean that audiences are able to generate more, and wider ranging, content to offer broadcasters, from letters, emails and text messages to photos, videos and blogs. Benefits of promoting and using UGC include free access to material which broadcasters might not otherwise obtain, for example footage of breaking news stories. Recent examples include the post election riots in Iran and the terrorist attacks in Mumbai.

The new guidelines address potential risks and concerns about the commercial and practical implications of using audience-generated material. "These guidelines come at a time when the production and availability of UGC continues to grow and there is increasing recognition that in order to take part in modern day information societies, people across the world need to be media and information literate," explained Mr Scott, of the School of International Development. "By providing not only space for the public to express themselves, but also the skills and capacity to take part in public debate, broadcasters can ensure that citizens' right to freedom of expression is realised, as well as engage with communities they might not
otherwise reach."

While the guidelines are written primarily for broadcasters, it is hoped they will also be of use to the wider media industry and regulators, as well media education organisations.

More information: The guidelines can be downloaded for free or purchased in book form: click here to visit the CBA shop.

Source: University of East Anglia

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