Results from Research On the Influence of the Medium in Film and Video Production on Mobile Communication

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Abstract:

It is well known that content and its processing obey different laws depending on the media in which that content is to be presented. The purpose of this article is to determine the rules that should be followed in the production of videos for handhelds. The present study is a follow-up study to Giessen (2008), which examined the various aspects, both formal and with respect to content, of moving image productions for the cinema, television and computers (in the context of multimedia productions). The results: For handhelds the settings should be restricted to close-ups, as in moving image sequences for computer-aided multimedia offerings. In contrast to this medium, the rhythm of segments for handheld productions may be a bit slower, however; the films may also be a bit longer. The most important difference is that handhelds better allow chronological, argumentative, and developing content.

Introduction

I have already attempted to describe how various media affect the design of moving image presentations (produced for the respective media) and in particular video films[1]. Evidently the situation of the user plays a determinative role.

This is illustrated by the following example: A cinematic screen is large; to fill it appropriately, one must create picture compositions rich in detail – so that the audience can grasp such detailed images, however, they must persist for a relatively long time, the edited segments must not follow one another too rapidly. The television picture and certainly the moving image frame on the computer monitor are of course considerably smaller. In this case an image too rich in detail would seem confusing and – in contrast to the cinematic screen – be less striking. Knee shots and even close-ups have therefore become customary for these media. Close-ups are naturally grasped more easily and faster, however, making also the image boring faster. Consequently (and because the viewer, unlike the cinema audience, can zap away or continue clicking in a multimedia offering), faster segments are required in productions if these media are to keep the viewer's attention focused on the moving image or video production.

The example shows how the formulation of a systematic relationship between different media on the one hand and the design of moving image presentations adequate to given media on the other hand requires more than theoretical considerations. Rather, the different situations of the users have a crucial impact on the production process.

The aforementioned article distinguished between moving image productions (1.) for the cinematic screen, (2.) for television and (3.) for a video frame in a computer-aided multimedia production (when the computer is used as a channel for TV productions by means of a full view display, the user's situation – the distance from the device, etc. – corresponds to that with television). The use characteristics vary according to the medium, as do the preconditions for a moving image production adequate to the specific medium.

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[1] Giessen, H. W. (2008). Video in Different Media Contexts; in: *EVA 2008.* Berlin: Gfal, 182-188

The fact that more and more moving image handhelds are being sold – such as various types of mobile phones, PDAs and the video iPod from Apple – raises the further question of the extent to which specific types of approaches are (again) necessary here. At present few productions are specifically geared to handhelds. The pornography industry is leading in this regard, but film schools, for example, are also increasingly starting to produce mini-movies for handhelds, while pop stars and pop groups are producing specific versions of their music clips for TV broadcasts and for handhelds. Advertising is also discovering the new medium, but of course must still wait until ways and possibilities emerge for reaching a critical mass of users. Since video is a crucial argument for handhelds, however, we may expect a fast development in this regard and a significant future market. In this context it is doubtlessly important to know and consider adequate methods of production. For this reason we wished to study how users consume the corresponding moving image materials and to determine the implications of the given use conditions for production.

We obtained 31 interviewees through a notice in the Saarland monopolist daily local newspaper “Saarbrücker Zeitung”, which seemed the most effective way of reaching as many different segments of the population as possible. Readers were told that volunteers should have previous experience with moving images on handhelds, which was also the case for all the respondents. Although younger people tend to fall under the average age of readers of the daily newspaper, the response by this segment of the population was disproportionately high (Tab. 1).

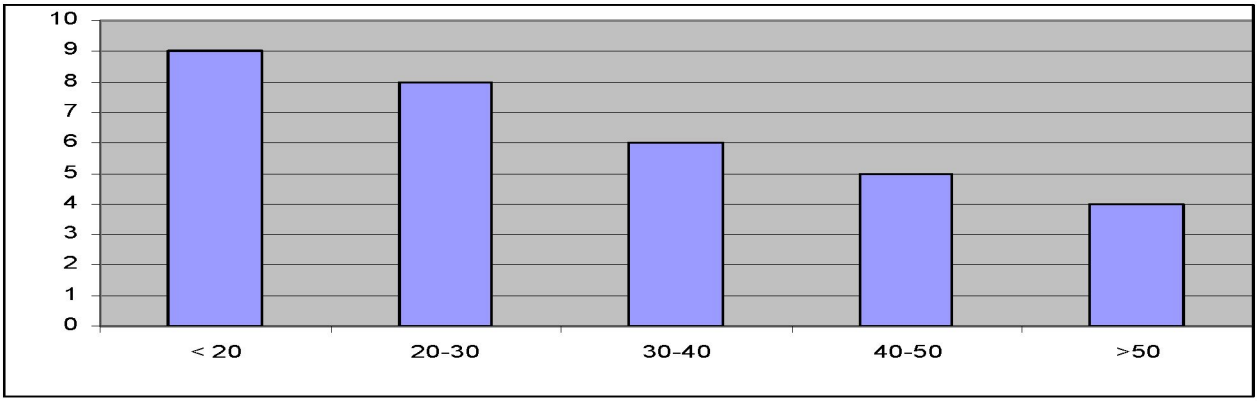

Table 1: age of the interviewees

This presented the single serious distortion in the study. In particular, the ratio of the sexes was nearly even (16 men, 15 women) – which at first surprised us. We had a predominance of interviewees with a high level of education (Tab. 2).

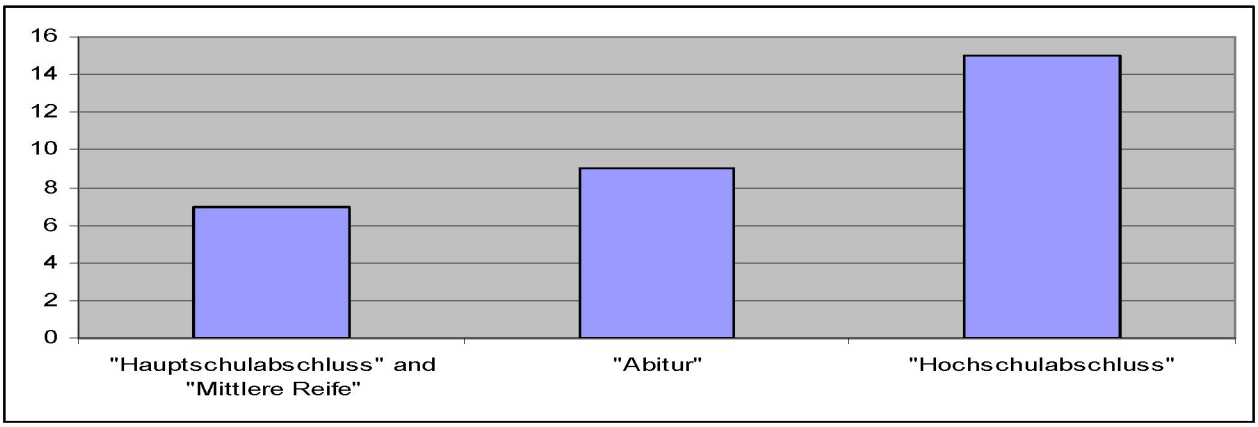

Table 2: level of education

Interestingly, however, this educational level evidently had practically no effect on the use conditions of interest to us. All subjects demonstrated a high level of media literacy, a fact evidently related to the date of the study. We assume that our subjects were so-called 'early adopters'. We found a correlation to exist between age and experience with the media in question, at least according to the personal impressions of the interviewers. Quite generally, the younger interviewees nearly always expressed themselves in more well-informed manner and more precisely compared with older interviewees. Overall, we found that age and sex – in contrast to level of education – affected responses to the questions to different extents.

We began by conducting partially structured interviews with the subjects, lasting about one hour each. In these interviews people were asked about their behaviour as users; they were also shown brief examples of productions that they then had to evaluate. The most important social data (age, sex, completed education) were requested as well as questions posed that could be formalised (period of possession of the corresponding media). Then the subjects were given a brief questionnaire, to be completed anonymously, containing questions that were too delicate for the interview (for example: a multiple choice question on the content used, including 'erotic' as a category).

Results

At first, a plausible supposition is that moving image productions for handhelds are to be evaluated similarly to productions for video frames on the computer monitor. One reason for this supposition lies in the identical, digital form of transmission in both cases (when TV images are digitally transmitted only the channel changes, not the subjective classification of the medium or the user behaviour characteristic of the medium; on the other hand, the digital form of transmission is the technical precondition for the existence of the handheld as a medium and for its use as a playback location for moving image productions, as is the case for computers and the use of multimedia productions). In addition, the rather limited picture size leads us to suppose similar preconditions for moving image productions in both media. A frame on the computer monitor usually has the size of about a fourth to a third of the screen size; image displays on handhelds today are generally reduced to about 3.5 inches. In other words, the image size is even smaller and details can be even more difficult to perceive.

Indeed, these formal similarities result in unclear displays of detailed images in both types of media, causing the viewer to tire rapidly. "*Wenn das Bild nur so klein-klein und chaotisch ist, verliert man schnell die Lust*" ("*When the picture is so tiny and chaotic, you quickly lose interest*") was one typical statement (female, 35). Size settings are therefore unavoidable for both media. "*Man muss aber natürlich gut erken nen können, was man sieht*" ("*Of course, you have to be able to easily recognize what you're seeing*"), said another interviewee (male, 27).

Table 3 hints that the image must be striking and quickly grasped: objects filling the picture, faces – no rapidly changing landscapes or scenes with masses of people. This obvious result, which must kept in mind, however, given its particular relevance to production, also suggests a structural similarity between moving images in multimedia productions and moving images on handhelds. The consequence of this similarity lies necessarily in a further parallelism. Here too there is the danger that the images will quickly bore the viewer precisely because they must be easy to grasp. A fast pace of segments must therefore contain impressive images. "*Naja, wenn das Bild langweilig ist und nicht fesselt, dann schaut man eher weg, oder?*" ("*Well, if the picture is boring and not captivating, them you tend to look away, right?* "), confirmed one female user (26).

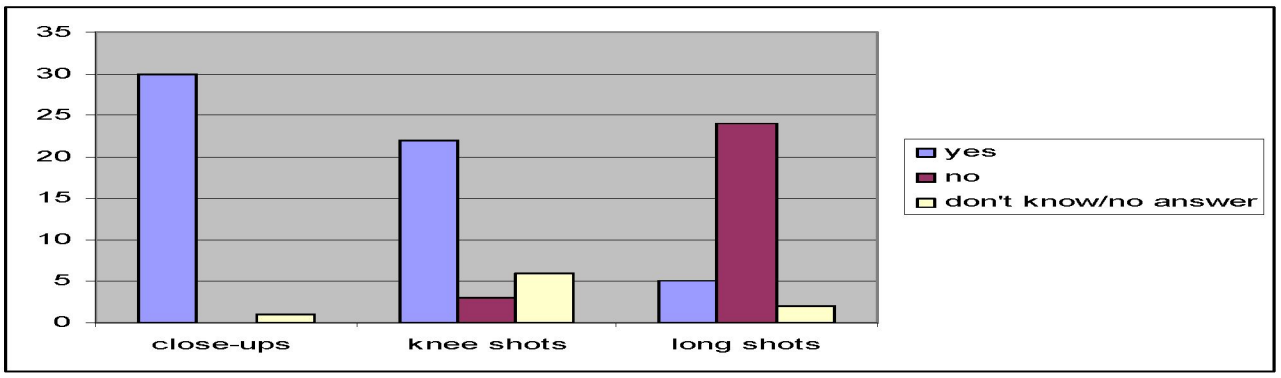

Table 3: preferences handhelds

Nevertheless, our surveys with demo clips in particular indicated that the segments must not be so short as in computer-based multimedia productions. On the one hand, the picture is now often so small that users indeed need more time to grasp it cognitively – in any case longer than with a computer monitor. "*Huch, wenn's nur so vorbeihuscht, das macht auch keinen Spaß* " ("*Hey! When it all just zips by, that's also not any fun!* "), said one 19-year old student; his assessment was confirmed by all the subjects without qualification whom we surveyed about the demo clips containing variably paced segments. Whereas we had recommended a very fast clip rhythm for multimedia productions, here an interval of three to five seconds before the next segment seems appropriate (table 4). Of course, the image should not persist as long as it would on the cinema screen (but nor should the image be as detailed as on the silver screen).

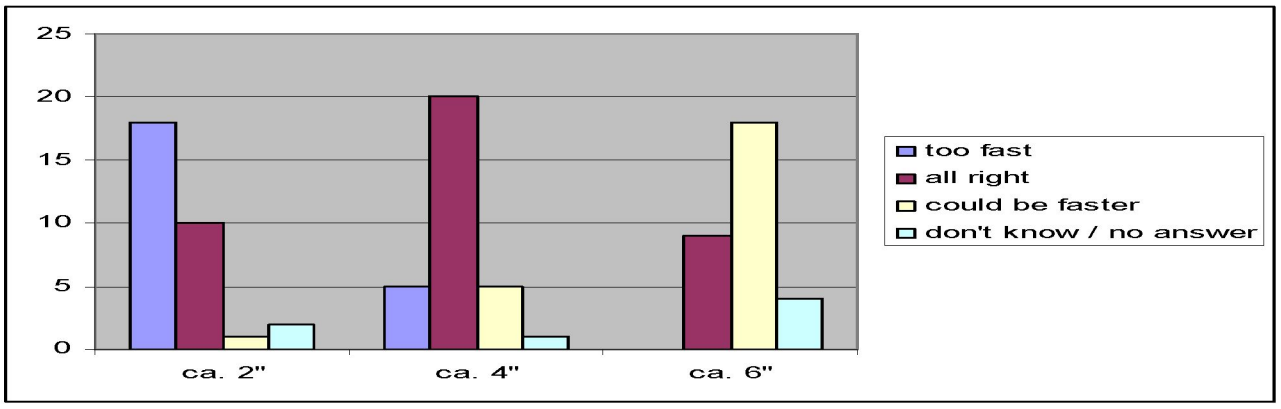

Table 4: acceptance of length (close-ups)

Our study also showed that the user situation with handhelds generally differs quite a lot from that with computer-run multimedia productions. This difference naturally also affects the production constraints with respect to content and form, which accordingly significantly differ in part from the analogous constraints on multimedia productions.

For example, shifting between different options as on a computer (glancing first at the video frame and then at the navigation bar or the adjacent text, perhaps even clicking further while the moving image production is still running) is also possible here, although not as easily, since in the case of multimedia productions on computers many different offerings (text, images, navigation bars, etc.) lie within the same screen, whereas on a handheld they are necessarily (because of the small monitor, the tiny navigation bars, etc.) accessed on different levels. "*Wenn Du telefonierst, dann telefonierst Du und kannst nichts anderes mit deinem Handy machen, wenn Du simst, dann simst Du und machst eigentlich auch nichts anderes, und wenn Du einen Clip anschaust, ist es das gleiche, ebenfalls, Du kannst nicht einen Clip ansehen und daneben was anderes machen, das geht ja gar nicht, wenn Du Dein Handy in der Hand hast und den Clip kuckst* " ("*When you make a phone call, then you're making a call and you can't do anything else on your mobile phone;*

when you're texting, then you're texting and really not doing anything else; and when you view a clip, then it's the same thing, since you can't both watch a clip and do something else – that's impossible when you're holding your mobile phone in your hand and watching the clip"), confirmed one female user (37).

All in all, we can say that viewing by these users is longer and more concentrated than with multimedia products (tab. 5). In any case we must consider the user behaviour to be so different that the production processes can no longer be transferred from the one sector to the other.

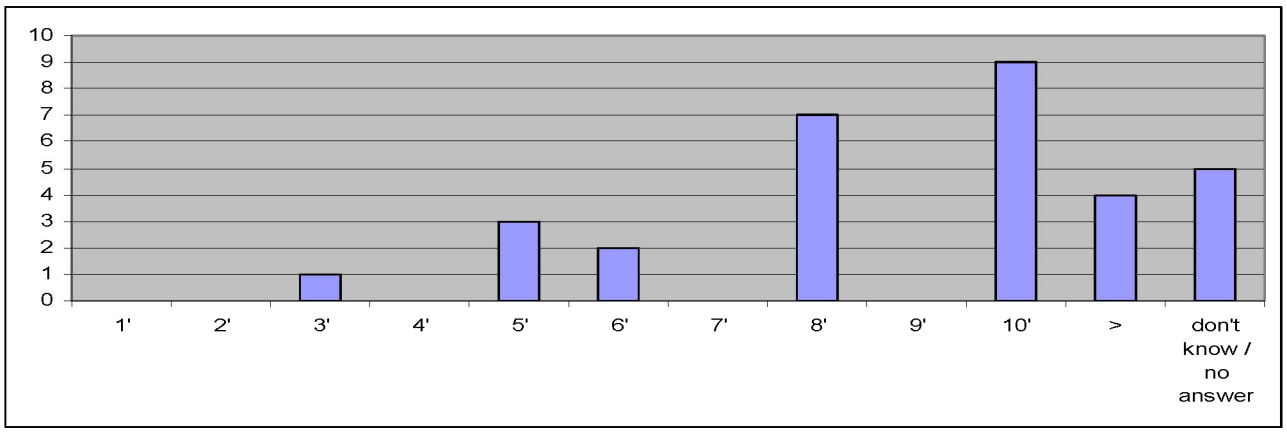

Table 5: How long do you usually watch to videos on your handeld?

Above all, the distractions are fewer: The focus lies exclusively on the device and therefore the image as well. The typical user situations, primarily involving waiting times, lead to a concentrated, more exclusive use of the media compared with moving image productions in the context of computer-run multimedia offerings.

In particular, people seem to view the content at the specific times suitable for them. Even video clips provided by friends (sent from mobile phone to mobile phone) are generally not viewed immediately, at least not in their entirety, as all 31 interviewees confirmed without exception; at most the beginning is briefly viewed (27 interviewees). Nevertheless, such personal and personalised clips are almost always viewed, and almost always completely, but at a time convenient to the viewer, i.e., when time and opportunity allow.

Short to medium-long moving image productions are therefore viewed completely and with concentration in large parts or even from beginning to end – in contrast to the user behaviour typical with computer-run multimedia productions.

We must note, however, that no one reported a plethora of offerings (as we know from television with its countless programmes of today – in contrast to the one to three programmes available in Germany through the 1980s – or from the large offering of moving image materials in the Internet). The interviewees knew only very few commercial providers – their mobile phone contracting parties with their own special offers, and the offerings of a few large TV stations (with CNN or BBC World known best to our group of subjects, and known considerably better than German providers like ZDF or ARD). It remains an open question whether and how the user behaviour will (again) change at a later time and under other economic conditions.

However, our surveys indicate that the specific types of use described will probably also be retained if moving images become more frequent and more a matter of course with handhelds. The added value of handhelds as a medium also supports this conjecture. For example, women seem to regard this medium as a strategy for avoiding men's glances, say, in buses (or other public spaces with forced inactivity and in the presence of other people). "*Wenn man auf das Handy kuckt, ist es egal, ob die Kerle einen anglotzen* ", said one young woman (21). She continued: "*Aber es ist dann natürlich gut, wenn man auch was hat, was man auf dem Handy ansehen kann, was ablenkt und spannend oder zumindest interessant ist.*" ("*When you look at your mobile phone,*

you don't care whether guys are gaping at you. But of course it's good if you also have something that you can watch on the phone and that distracts you and is exciting or at least interesting"). This added value compels concentrated use for quite a longer period of time.

The consequence is just that films can (or even must be) longer than the quite brief moving image productions that seem appropriate to computer-run multimedia productions. Since there are fewer distractions with handhelds and a video once started is also viewed in a relatively concentrated way, no extreme shortening of the lengths of films seems necessary or useful. The surveys found that here too a film should not be longer than a maximum of ten to fifteen minutes – this is however twice or three times as long as the proposed standard length of a multimedia production.

In our view, broadcasts on special occasions form an exception: For example, a traveller will watch a sporting event like a football game in its entirety once he has begun watching and as long as his journey is not finished, even if the broadcast lasts one and a half hours. This was confirmed by all our subjects (except for two women, who stated they were not interested in such events or even in current political or other news reports), although both the question and answers were hypothetical: At the time of the survey none had ever viewed an entire football match or other live report from an information provider on their handheld.

Still, there were several users of news channels who also reported viewing generally at least three, and on the overage even four to five, news reviews. Several people also confirmed having viewed reports for longer times if they were interesting.

This brings us to the question of what content is suitable for handhelds as a medium. Here again it is still too early to give a specific answer. Regarding commercial offerings, nearly all subjects confirmed knowing music clips and movie trailers, with 29 of the 31 people questioned viewing video clips from current pop songs at least 'occasionally'; movie trailers are used much less often (five of the 31). 27 subjects use news channels at least 'occasionally'. Eight male subjects also confirmed anonymously having had experience with pornographic clips.

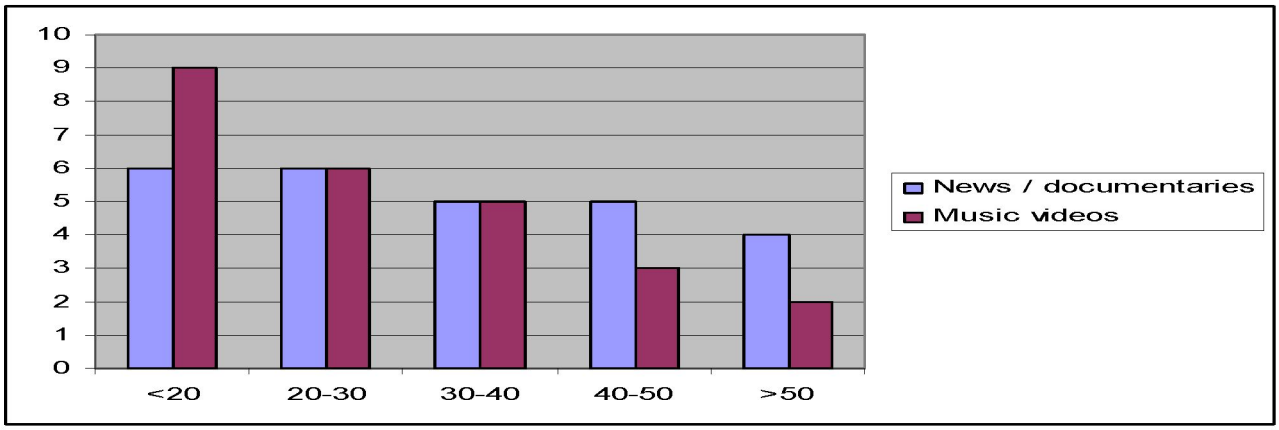

Table 6: Do you rather watch news or documentaries on your handheld, or rather music videos, or both, or none? (multiple answers possible)

Differences in age and education played the biggest role in the question about preferred content. The older the subjects were, the greater was their interest in information broadcasts and the less their interest in music clips; the younger the subjects were, the more pronounced was the inverse weighting (tab. 6.).

Which offerings will ultimately prevail doesn't seem certain yet; the surveys revealed a contrast with the use of moving image material from computer-run multimedia offerings. In the latter case, only a few users had continuously viewed a longer moving image from beginning to end. As a rule, within a relatively short period of time they had made use of the interactive possibilities of the medium. For example, they used the scroll bar to move to the end of the production, in order to see

how it ends. When they wanted to return to the film, they rarely found their 'point of exit'; to avoid repetitions, they usually sought a new 'entry point'. Generally they therefore missed a segment; in any case they failed to view the film continuously or in chronological order. This characteristic user behaviour could be accommodated by a production based on the principle of the 'varying presentation' instead of a continuous, chronologically based and logically developed film. For the rest, this approach to content seemed already practical for many television formats (and already practised there): Here again viewing rarely occurs without interruptions. Characteristic for contemporary user behaviour is that viewers 'leave' a broadcast by zapping through the programmes, 'get stuck' elsewhere and at some later time return to the film they 'actually' wanted to see; whoever expects or must expect such user behaviour will also produce broadcasts according to the 'varying presentation' principle. Generally talk shows, but also fictional formats like the daily soap operas, comply with this requirement.

It's particularly striking that our interviewees did not report such user behaviour with handhelds. There the medium, and the typical situations in which it is used, compel viewing a film in its chronological sequence. "*Wenn wir Filme auf dem Handy ansehen, dann schauen wir auch recht aufmerksam zu, wir schauen selten woanders hin. Wir schauen den Film von Anfang bis Ende an, oder bis wir angerufen werden oder so. Aber meistens schauen wir den Film von Anfang bis Ende an, ja, genau* " ("*When we watch films on the mobile phone, then we also look at them very attentively, and we rarely look elsewhere. We watch the film from beginning to end, or until we get a call or something. But usually we watch the film from start to finish, right, that's it*"), confirmed one handheld user (male, 31).

For this reason it seems that handhelds (again) allow chronological, logical and developing content, or that such content is feasible, despite the type of productions hitherto made available in particular by contractual providers for mobile phones: music clips, film trailers and erotic segments will doubtlessly continue to persist, while on the other hand other more specific genres may develop with content not so distinctly reduced – in any case, it need not be so reduced, in contrast to computer-aided multimedia offerings.

Our results at a glance:

Image size	Extreme close-ups, low in details. The image must be extremely striking and quickly grasped: objects filling the picture, faces; no rapidly changing landscapes or scenes with masses of people.
Segment rhythm	As a rule, a fast pace of segments; the images do not persist for long. Segments of three to five seconds seem appropriate.
Film length	Longer than multimedia productions, but over five minutes only in streaming.
Content	In contrast to moving image productions for computer-aided multimedia, handhelds again allow chronologically ordered, logical and developing content.