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## Multimedia Content Production Inside the Classroom – A Teaching Proposal for Journalism and Audiovisual Communication Students

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**Abstract:** The main objective of this article is to present and describe two multimedia experiences carried out during two practice groups in the Journalism and Audiovisual Communications program. Thirty students participated in Experience A during 14 teaching sessions, and the experience required each student to record a 3-minute interview of someone newsworthy within academia and, then, create a short documentary piece of up to 5 minutes. Experience B focused on content curation using *Storify*, and the ultimate goal of the practice exercise was to produce a story from different multimedia contents found within the platform. A SWOT analysis after integrating both experiences revealed that, although students were willing and motivated to use new technologies and produce audiovisual content, they also showed low motivation to work in groups, scant prior knowledge of the medium, and a lack of adaptation to complex situations. As such, the researchers conclude this type of experience can be valuable as the convergence of content and skills in audiovisual and journalistic settings responds to the courses' demands and facilitates their adaptation to the EHEA requirements.

**Keywords:** Journalism, audiovisual, technological convergence, multimedia, teaching

### Introduction

The new university scene requires more dedication to practice content by faculty and students. For graduate students, especially in the area of communication, these exercises in the classroom and beyond are essential to complete their education. As such, this paper tries to analyze, from two teaching experiences, the possibilities audiovisual tools offer to faculty and students, which could serve to apply the knowledge acquired in lectures.

The main objective of this article is to present and describe two multimedia experiences carried out during two practice groups in the Journalism and Audiovisual Communications program. Based on the SWOT analysis of both experiences, a classroom activity is proposed, in which part of the contents developed independently by the two groups converge. On the other hand, this piece reflects on the applicability of this academic activity, taking into account the needs of a professional environment that requires skills in multimedia content creation.

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First, the inclusion of practical knowledge as an academic model, eminently theoretical, is contextualized. Then, a description and potential of the tools used in both teaching experiences follows and, after describing these specific activities and analyzing their strengths and weaknesses, the results obtained are discussed and a final proposal that includes the contents of both activities is made.

## **Practice Inside the Classroom: Applied Theory**

### **Studies in Communications**

As noted in the introduction, a major innovation in the field of higher education (within the European Higher Education Area [EHEA]), involves changes in teaching courses. Result of a conception of education that values as positive practicing what has been learned, it could be argued, theoretically, that there are three pillars in the current academic scene: an increase in student participation in the teaching dynamics; an increase in the independent work of the student, supervised by the professor; and, together with class attendance, preparing practice exercises that could serve to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired and that would be a quantifiable part of the student assessment (Herrero, 2009, p.2).

Notwithstanding, for the moment, the complicated application of these academic demands within the Spanish university system (such as budget and labor deficiencies arising from the scant and needed government support in order to ensure an effective change that will not exclude in any case a demanding and enforceable theoretical training), and the commercial interests identified in the implementation of some of these guidelines, the fact is that, in certain disciplines, some of the proposed changes were necessary. This is the case, as supposed, of the so-called Information and Communication Sciences or, to be more precise, current programs in journalism and audiovisual communication.

With a dynamic and practical profile, some of the courses in the curricula of both subject areas have been reformulated with the intent to include new knowledge, but also to strengthen classical but still undervalued skills in the Spanish university environment. While new dissemination tools for audiovisual and journalistic content impose educational challenges that must be addressed, if the idea is to promote effective education, producing and editing this material is, once the apparent obsolescence of the technical tools used is overcome, nothing new in the study of these disciplines. News recordings, making documentaries or informative programs, shooting, editing, and post-producing, among others, have been present with varying degrees of development in the curricula for years.

This is not solely driven by the adaptation needs of such knowledge areas to a professional scenario, increasingly less clear and solvent, but by the demands of theoretical and practical knowledge involving both journalism and audiovisual communications, from the moment they are taught in centers of reflection and critical thinking, as universities would (or should) be. To be clear, journalistic and audiovisual knowledge goes through the control of practice skills, which turn into intellectual skills. Writing (well), developing news or essay dissertations, knowing how to cover relevant events in an informative way, or conducting interviews are, evidently, some of them.

Producing and disseminating audiovisual materials are other unavoidable skills. The challenge resides, therefore, in the efficiency in imparting that knowledge (taking into account the scenario in which they develop) and the needed coherence between two disciplines clearly related

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(see Arroyo, 2002; Garcia Garrido, 2002; Gutierrez, 2002; Gutierrez Martin, 2003; Vilches Norat, 2002).

### **Description of the Tools**

Based on the above, the tools used to, first, produce audiovisual material (i.e., recording and editing audiovisual clips), and then transmit this content will be described.

### **Digital Recording and Non-Linear Editing of Audiovisual Contents**

The variety of devices that allow audiovisual recording and editing is extensive. Currently, the market provides a countless array of video or photographic cameras, and post-production and editing software, whose management has been greatly simplified over time. This great offer, which at first glance seems an advantage, also causes problems for users, who may linger in a field like education: obsolescence or incompatibility between devices is well known, but it is also very simple to find, in the endless supply, suitable tools for almost any type of audiovisual needs.

It is also necessary to note the combination of functions between these devices and the development of mobile applications that make it possible to record or photograph with a single terminal and, soon after, edit these images within a short period of time, when it used to take longer and involved more complex tasks (see Herrero, 2009, p. 130-134). These tools are, in many cases, reduced in size, easy operation, and relatively affordable (e.g., mobile phones), which makes it easy to obtain images and combine them into a montage. And, this has therefore resulted in the exaggerated increase in audiovisual material in existence today. Added to Internet access for disseminating images, and the development of video compression software, it results in a scenario where massive amounts of audiovisual content is produced (see Willem, 2009, p. 49-66).

The use of these recording tools and editing software (see Montoya, 2005, p. 11) in disciplines such as journalism and audiovisual communication is essential: most communications (informative, documentary, fictional...) composed in both areas go through the proper hardware use and appropriate software. But media literacy (education about and with media as teaching aids, areas of study, and work techniques ([Perez Rodriguez, 2004, p. 179]), includes other theoretical skills that suggest teaching in these areas should achieve a balance between technical education in all these devices and ample theoretical knowledge. Recording and editing skills rely, inevitably, in the continuous screening of a wide range of audiovisual material (information products, reports, films, new media formats) and seeking the relevant theoretical literature (Delors, 1996).

It must be remembered that the quality of all these processes depends on devoting adequate time to each of the tasks, especially when the students are learning to handle what to them is relatively new equipment. Furthermore, if these tasks are to be performed diligently, time must be devoted to understanding the different audiovisual narratives (producing a short piece on fiction is not the same as covering the news with a mobile device or taking pictures for an audiovisual chronicle). Therefore, the necessary and minimal tools to provide such lessons, in addition to screenings and texts, are: MiniDV cameras (with the appropriate tapes), or digital SLR or automatic cameras with memory cards or mobile recording devices; tripods; lavalier microphones (with the appropriate consumables) and sound devices integrated in each camera;

nonlinear editing software with the appropriate hardware; and other accessories and supplies (light sources, cables...) (see Espinosa & Abbate, 2005).

### **Content Curation: Storify**

The Web 2.0, based on the exchange of contents (of any kind) in real time and under usability parameters that allow any user to participate in its potentials, has provided many user-friendly tools and applications. This allows anyone to create content, publish, and share it with other Web surfers. All this without it being necessary to have a professional knowledge on the subject matter.

The latest data, published in various reports regarding the state of the information society, indicate that the penetration of social networks among Spanish Internet users aged between 19 and 24 years old is nearly 90% (Fundacion Telefonica, 2012, p. 82), 45% of Internet users in the world are under 25 years old (Garcia Hervas, 2012, p. 8), and 98.4% of those with a college education that have less than 45 years old are Internet users (Observatorio Nacional de Telecomunicaciones y de la Sociedad de la Informacion, 2013, p. 17). Thus, it can be said that university students spend a lot of time surfing, sharing content, and consulting social media.

This is the main reason why tools and resources that serve the common Internet user are needed, in order to discard information, filter, and select parameters that aide in selecting the most relevant content according to the specified search criteria. The *Storify* software is a content curation tool that helps filter and select, under some algorithmic criteria, the most relevant content found in social networks. In this way, the platform user can create stories integrating all the narratives generated within a digital environment in a journalistic manner, different to what had been offered so far through other means.

The platform focuses on the most popular social networks, but also in those whose potential lies in the content their users post and share, such as Flickr or Instagram, which have become true photographic digital archives. Storify allows any user to open an account and start publishing. Users can login through their Twitter account, without having to register again all their details. The platform offers usage tips for creating stories, keys that are consistent with the criteria any journalism student should consider when writing a story:

- Be clear about what to narrate and how.
- Do not create stories about generalities, but rather look for specific topics.
- When selecting content search the "best of the best." Do not choose from the first search results.
- Collate photos, text, video, audio, and more. Try to keep two or three multimedia resources.
- Check spelling and choose a good headline for the story.

When the user creates a story, the application provides modules (as text boxes or fields) in which the first thing to be done is to write a title, and immediately a web address is generated for that particular story. The user can search through different social networks, Google, or other websites by entering a given topic in the Storify search engine. Next, the platform shows some results (texts, tweets, photos, or videos), and the author can select those of interest and drag the modules available to the left under the title of the story. The order of the fields and, therefore, the story can be modified depending on the criteria of the creator.

## Methodology

### Description of Experience A

Having 30 students and 14 teaching sessions, this experience meant to equip students with the basic knowledge for the construction of two audiovisual exercises: first, each student had to record a 3-minute interview of someone newsworthy within academia and, then, create a short documentary piece of 5 minutes at most.

For this, after explaining the evaluation criteria and the working system, two classes were devoted to understanding the simplest audiovisual narratives (types of planes, kinds of audiovisual montage, terminology...). The classes, which included analysis of screenings and supporting texts, were completed with students sharing the specific bibliography to complete these tasks. Faculty then proceeded to teach students how to manage the recording cameras provided by the University (MiniDV and HDV cameras), which were to be used in recording the first exercise at the university campus, as well as rehearse some basic recording routines: turning on the camera, set parameters, sound and image capture indoor and outdoor, etc. In this way, during class sessions five and six, the recordings of the short interviews were conducted at the University's photography set. Since there was no need for editing, this material was imported and saved, and students accomplished their first exercise, to be evaluated during a group screening in classroom in which the potential, successes, and failures of each interview were discussed.

Afterward, three class sessions were devoted to the teaching of a non linear digital editing software used in the university, and already transferred and stored short video clips were edited to practice some of the technical possibilities offered by the program. This was followed by the screenwriting the documentary piece in group, and the students then proceeded to record the required materials outside the classroom with any recording or photographic devices, encouraging a more creative and free use of these tools.

After agreeing on a delivery deadline, these images were imported and stored to proceed then with the editing and, as previously done with the first practice exercise, finally screen the audiovisual pieces to be analyzed collectively. All these tasks were accompanied by the production tasks that students had to accomplish on their own to obtain the recordings, with the support and mentoring of the faculty.

### Description of Experience B

Students were asked to organize into groups of three or four members. They chose a topic within the themes discussed in class, as recommended, and enrolled to use the software. The ultimate goal of the practice exercise was to produce a story from different multimedia contents found within the platform, and its originality and appropriate use of journalistic standards covered in other courses were to be evaluated.

The intended results after the completion of the task were for students to reflect on the use of social media in journalism, to implement content curation, and to be able to develop a multimedia newspaper report. In addition, at the end of the exercise, students were asked to present a group reflection on the use of the platform as future journalists. Some of the remarks made were:

*An advantage when using Storify is it differentiates what is important, separates the “noise” of what really matters, what makes someone seeing what we write exactly as they want to see it. Interaction is vital, as it adds what is said in social networks, participation is evident as what we write is constructed, in part, by what users comment about the news piece. (Group 3, Experience A, Journalism and Audiovisual Communication students)*

*As future journalists the capacity of this software to add content to our stories is of great importance, you can add hyperlinks, insert text, videos, content added by users, studies, articles, and photos in perfect chronological order; to this the possibility to produce work in collaboration with others is added, which encourages teamwork. (Group 4, Experience A, Journalism and Audiovisual Communication students)*

### **Integrating Experience A and Experience B**

After launching the two teaching experiences, and observing that students were able to easily adapt to the work dynamics, including recording, editing, and disseminating news content, the combination of both training activities is proposed as follows: first, open a common forum in the University’s Web space, where students from both experiences propose the topics to be worked simultaneously. While students from experience A produce content, they should create a group blog and, after recording and editing the content, upload the different audiovisual and photographic materials there so that students from experience B can select content to produce their multimedia news reports.

### **SWOT Analysis**

<b>INTERNAL</b>	<b>EXTERNAL</b>
<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students’ high willingness to produce audiovisual content.</li> <li>• Motivation for using new technologies.</li> <li>• Ease of learning and use of simultaneous technologies.</li> <li>• The possibility to implement creative processes.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low motivation to work in groups.</li> <li>• Low frustration tolerance.</li> <li>• Scant prior knowledge of the medium.</li> <li>• Lack of adaptation to complex situations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It favors the continuous evaluation process required by the EHEA.</li> <li>• It favors content cross-section among courses.</li> <li>• It encourages teamwork.</li> <li>• It promotes organization and responsibility when undertaking audiovisual and journalistic work.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Software and hardware technical difficulties.</li> <li>• The required investment for technical resources and equipment.</li> <li>• Limited calendar flexibility.</li> <li>• Requires extra time on the part of the faculty.</li> </ul>



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## Conclusions

In view of the description of both experiences and subsequent SWOT analysis of the teaching proposal, it can be concluded that the convergence of content and skills in audiovisual and journalistic settings responds to the courses' demands and facilitates their adaptation to the EHEA requirements.

The academic activities proposed in this article aim to create links between different courses in order to help students avoid the false impression that different knowledge areas are compartmentalized and unrelated. In addition, students should acquire greater knowledge and get acquainted with some of the functions they may assume in their future careers.

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