

Using Mobile Devices by Media Students as a Tool for Digital Storytelling

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The introduction of mobile devices has brought about dramatic transitions not only in how ordinary individuals communicate with one another, but also in how media students learn to tell highly compelling digital stories. In higher education, mobile devices are increasingly proving to be quite powerful tools aiding media students in learning storytelling techniques across media platforms. This chapter draws on a pilot project involving a survey of mass communication students at the American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, in which iPads and smart phones were used to generate video stories as course assignments. A survey of students involved in the project reveals they were highly passionate about doing their video storytelling assignment on iPads and smart phones as compared with traditional audio-visual capturing tools. The authors see a huge potential for mobile devices as credible media gathering tools in the emerging real-world journalistic practices.

INTRODUCTION

Journalism, as a professional practice, has experienced huge transitions in the past two decades, driven mainly by digital convergence and mobile communications. The rise of smart mobile devices as production and communication tools has come to hugely impact the way journalism has been conducted in the first two decades of the 21st Century. Defined by their multimedia features and mobile communication capabilities, smart phones have gone far beyond their primary functions as personal communication devices into becoming key tools for the journalism profession. There is ample evidence that mobile

devices have already been deployed into professional journalistic contexts (especially those of social space) in addition to their claimed role as drivers of the citizen journalism phenomenon. The advances in the technical capabilities of mobile devices, coupled with the changing habits of news consumption is shifting audiences' access to news from traditional print and broadcast model to digital social media platforms. This presents opportunities but also challenges. On the one hand, the cost of creating and delivering news has decreased markedly, opening the field for independent journalists and creating opportunities that has not existed previously. On the other hand, this rapid development presents its own challenges. The fact that more people are increasingly accessing news on social media suggests that those platforms need better algorithms to protect from fake news and platform control of what we see. In addition, audiences' demand for live streaming content and expectation of news immediacy has put enormous pressure on journalism to deliver news faster, something that might compromise the integrity of news content. Mobile devices present only part of this solution by allowing for relatively faster content creation. The future of journalism will, no doubt, need to address some of the teething problems that come with new technologies; but at the same time, we need to ensure that journalism students are trained and ready to be competitive in this new field of mobile journalism.

In light of the above, mobile technologies are seen as highly central to the development of media education in smart learning contexts. The introduction of university curricula that embrace mobile journalism as a key feature of student training does not only bring journalism education into closer alignment with smart learning trends; it also helps to sensitize future communicators to the changing nature of the profession. A survey of a sample of mass communication students at the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates has revealed extensive support for mobile integration in journalism training and practice. The findings of the survey show students' strong passion for being part of a smart mobile journalism (MOJO) revolution as more AI-supported technology continues to improve in processing power, storage capacity, production efficiency and distribution speed. While respondents' answers in support of integrating mobile devices in journalism reflect significant enthusiasm on the part of the would-be journalists for this trend, the writers believe institutional adoption of mobile journalism in professional contexts would hugely contribute to provide sustainability for the MOJO practice.

Review of MOJO Practices and Research

The phrase "digital storytelling" has come to describe both telling stories on digital platforms and more recently – with the latest advances in mobile technologies- using smart devices like mobile phones and tablets to tell stories and report the news. Journalists are increasingly turning to mobile devices that give them greater freedom to shoot anytime, anywhere and publish right from the field, thus ensuring freshness in news outputs and efficiency in journalistic performance. New methods in creating and distributing content have come not only to affect methodologies related to news reporting, but also to define both form and structure of news stories (Davis & Weinshenker, 2012). In effect, mobile journalism denotes more than just harnessing technologies to tell news stories on digital platforms; it actually heralds a new era in how news is collected, formulated, distributed and subsequently consumed. This new era requires new business models, new competencies for journalism and new formulas to create an implicit audience contract drawing on maximized digital platform potential to sustain news consumption.

Though we seem to be in the early phases of this digital shift, an increasing number of news organizations are already looking seriously into adopting mobile journalism as part of their daily operations

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