

Teaching mobile journalism (MOJO) *Report from the syndicate at the WJEC*

Definition

We spent some time on a definition, and (with some dissention) we agreed that we meant CELL PHONE JOURNALISM.

This means journalism where the reporting tool, for recording audio and video, and writing material and transmitting it, is done via a mobile phone. It is probably most used for breaking news – eg sporting events, accidents or tragedies.

Many people might add a BUBO (a gadget that fits round an iPhone which will enable better film and sound to be recorded).

We decided not to consider backpack journalism, where the reporter has a fairly substantial backpack and therefore a better video camera etc.

The main implications of this change of kit is that it becomes

1. much easier for the reporter to record video and audio without carrying around bulky kit, and
2. must speedier to get the reporting onto the web

Most of this work is likely to be done in the future on SMART PHONES – that is iPhones, BlackBerrys and whatever else is being developed at the moment.

However, for those with less smart phones, there are free apps which can be downloaded which will enable you to shoot video etc

www.bambuser.com

www.qik.com

www.flixwagon.com

and others.

It is important to note that there are many areas, not only here in Africa, where coverage and equipment is not widespread enough for students to do this. However, it seems likely that the technology is spreading so fast that areas which are at present not well served, will soon be as well or better served than, say, the US and Europe.

Technological change

At the risk of stating the obvious, we agreed that our session was a microcosm of the whole conference here: technology is changing so rapidly that it is hard to keep up with the changes to journalism and therefore journalism education.

Mobile, or cell phone journalism has DANGERS and OPPORTUNITIES.

The **opportunities** are, for example, the instant transmission of video and film of Iran, Zimbabwe and elsewhere: getting facts about events out to the world accurately and quickly. This has great implications for supporting democracy.

The **dangers** are linked with opportunities, and they are the same ones as have existed for the last 15 years or so since the internet became widespread. There are the problems of who is monitoring what goes out and how accurate it is. This is essentially the question of whether there enough responsible gatekeepers. In the future, in some areas, the traditional system we have seen of reporter – news editor – sub editor – editor may not apply.

Again, this point is a microcosm of the whole conference: until recently, professional journalistic standards related to institutions – now we are detached from those standards. Fifteen years ago these institutions and their standards were the curators of the news, and now they are not.

There are also ethical questions (see below).

There is a side issue of citizen journalism – but we did not discuss this in detail, because we are still hoping to train students to work as professionals.

We agreed that the fundamental skills are still all important: this technology is after all just a tool – so most journalism teachers are likely to think that it is best to teach the basic journalistic skills of story-spotting, researching and interviewing before embarking on mobile journalism.

Ethics

Some of the ethical dilemmas a journalist faces are multiplied in this sphere:

Two of the main worries are: recording people without their knowledge, (to do with the tools) and getting it onto the web (speed) before anyone had time to consider the implications of the story.

The plus of course is that you can publish and amend, adding context, removing material which might offend.

Should students transmit instantly to the web? There was plenty of dissent about this in the group! Several members allow students to get material onto blogs immediately, indeed in some cases this LIVE work was seen as essential to their training. Tutors often hold sessions afterwards, which are either simply feedback, or feedback plus editing and refining the material.

Professional work

Another point which has run through the whole conference, is how to monetise this work. There were no easy answers to this question.

Techniques

There are slight differences to the basics of reporting, which students need to be taught. One is that the sound is not great, so it is important for the reporter to get in close to the subject. This shows a need for sophisticated people- and interviewing skills, for example knowing how to talk to subjects beforehand to get them at their ease.

Also, the camera again is not great – the reporter needs to keep it stable, if you want movement you can't pan: the subject has to come into the frame.

The reporter needs to ask questions slowly – you want the microphone to pick up the sound

You have to work in short bursts: interviews have to be in clips of about a minute: the bandwidth not great so reporters can't do a 20 minute interview. However, technology is moving so fast, that this is improving all the time. Students also need to know about connection.

Retraining faculty

There may be a need to retrain tutors: in some cases students are coming into a classroom with higher abilities than their tutors.

Useful links

www.coveritlive.com creates a page on your blog – you can send video, audio to it.

www.mojo-revolution.com: at the Winter Olympics: students used iPhones with VeriCorder to produce material.

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