

Homeschooling. Attitude of Latvian Journalists Towards Inclusion of Mobile Technology in Their Daily Work

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Abstract. In the contemporary era, mobile technologies have become an essential aspect of daily existence. These technologies, encompassing digital and mobile platforms, permeate the everyday lives of a significant portion of the citizenry. Statistics indicate that in 2023, approximately 93.1% of households had access to the Internet. It is important to note that these technologies serve not only as tools for entertainment and communication, but also possess the potential to be utilized for professional endeavours. It is widely believed that the use of mobile technologies constitutes an integral part of the practices deemed essential for a journalist. For instance, journalists may employ mobile phones to record interviews, report from the scene of events, capture video footage, and take photographs. Additionally, smartphones provide access to the Internet, enabling journalists to acquire knowledge, generate ideas, and create live text broadcasts. However, a pertinent question arises: to what extent have media editorials embraced these technologies? Furthermore, is there a systematized approach to the introduction and utilization of modern technologies within the media landscape? This report presents an analysis of preliminary data obtained from a survey conducted among Latvian journalists and media students at the end of 2023. The survey was conducted as part of the project titled “Mobile Journalism: Practice and Education in Central and Eastern Europe”. Researchers from the University of Latvia's Social Science Faculty collaborated with other universities in the region to investigate the use of mobile technologies and the challenges encountered by journalists in Europe in their work and daily lives. The survey data were compared to the findings on an in depth interview with eight journalists and editors from national and regional Latvian media outlets. They reveal a generally positive attitude to learning and using technologies in their work. The largest challenges are the ability to learn to use them and time needed to acquire new skills.

Keywords: mobile journalism, mobile technologies, convergence, multimedia journalism

Introduction

The historical development of mass media, news media, and journalism has been inextricably connected to the evolution of technology (Pavlik 2001, 3–5). Although the profession of journalism, as we understand it today, did not exist at the time of the printing press's invention, one can trace the historical development of information technologies, news gathering, and dissemination. Conboy (2004, 9) notes that the first known news pamphlet, which has survived the passage of time, was printed and distributed in 1513. This pamphlet recounted the events of a significant battle and was accompanied by a woodcut illustration. Subsequently, more elaborate descriptions of events gained popularity and demand. Conboy (2004, 15) writes: "News was increasingly being traded as a commodity".

As witnessed by the progression from the printing press and humanity's ability to produce and reproduce text more rapidly to the development of the Internet and various other modern technologies, journalists must embrace these technologies not only because they facilitate various aspects of their work but also due to changing audience demands and requirements. The need for online news media grew as people began to use computers, the Internet, and mobile devices connected to the Internet. At this juncture, there is no doubt that, at least in Latvia, online new media has surpassed and outperformed printed press and, in some ways, even television and radio (Krūtainė, Tetarenko-Supe 2024). One of the most significant changes has been brought about by the aforementioned mobile devices, both from the perspective of audience expectations and the journalist's role in creating news stories (Salzmann *et al.* 2023, 346–347).

However, the question arises as to how journalists perceive the ever-evolving technological landscape that imposes new requirements upon them. Journalists now possess the ability to record interviews, photograph the subjects of their own stories, and even live stream developing events. Although modern technology companies have endeavoured to make these functions as user-friendly as possible, they still necessitate certain skills and understanding from the journalist. For instance, taking a high-quality photograph still requires the photographer to possess a fundamental understanding of how light and shadows affect the image, as well as some knowledge of framing. Consequently, for a journalist specializing in writing, taking photographs represents a new skill that must be acquired. Conversely, newsrooms may not feel the need to employ professional photographers if journalists can multitask. Thus, there may be multiple points of friction between journalists, editors, publishers, and audiences, each with their own wants, needs, and agendas.

Previously, there have not been any studies in Latvia that specifically focus on the attitudes of journalists toward mobile journalism and the use of mobile tools in fulfilling their work assignments. This pilot study examines the relationship

between news media and journalists and utilizes two unpublished data sets to outline attitudes and identify questions that should be addressed in a larger study. The report analyses initial data from a survey of Latvian journalists and media students, conducted in late 2023 as part of the project “Mobile Journalism: Practice and Education in Central and Eastern Europe”. In this project, researchers from Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Latvia collaborate with other universities in the region to explore the use of mobile technologies and the challenges they pose in the work and daily lives of journalists in Europe. The other data set consists of a series of eight in-depth interviews with media professionals and journalists with more than 25 years of experience working in their respective fields. These interviews were conducted in the summer of 2020.

Technology and journalism

Progress of technology has given many tools to journalists to use when compared even to situation 10 or 20 years ago. The smartphones have given abilities or recording and accessing information as well as given tools for disseminating it. At the same time there are many factors that should be considered when talking about mobile journalism. This can be viewed from the perspective of media convergence (Deuze 2004, 142). By using mobile technologies journalistic profession expands while at the same time converges with other professions as well as with the audiences.

Initially, the term “convergence” was employed to describe the blurring of boundaries between different communication forms within the context of emerging, technologically-driven media. Early research in this area primarily focused on the innovation and development of media technologies themselves (Xiong, Zhang 2018). Meanwhile, over the time it has gained a wider definition and now looks at various cultural, technological and communicative aspects, all of which in the era of digital media have changed the ways how media rooms work, produce content and interact with audiences. (Menke *et al.* 2018).

In this study, the focus is on the technological aspect, as the mobile technologies offer a powerful tool that, as mentioned can facilitate convergence of various news media roles into one person. For example, by using a phone, a reporter can capture information for purposes of writing a news story, and, moreover, take pictures that will be printed or posted with a news story. Journalists can also be publishers of their own work – using mobile device to post images, videos, sound and text online. Smartphones these days even offer the ability to edit video or sound files without the need of a computer. Emerging AI technologies are now offering even more abilities.

Multimedia journalism, mobile journalism, digital journalism, and other types of journalism are different lenses with which researchers can analyse the impact,

influences, effects of modern technology on media professionals. In the context of this study, multimedia journalism is understood as media scholar Mark Deuze described – as the presentation of a news story package on a website using two or more media formats; secondly, as the integrated (although not necessarily simultaneous) presentation of a news story package through different media, such as (but not limited to) a website e-mail, SMS and other types and formats of news communication to audiences (Deuze 2004, 140). In the 16 years since Deuze wrote of multimedia journalism, in the principle of the matter nothing has changed, while regarding the technological aspect, the ways a journalist can tell a story have multiplied. Almost any journalist these days has a smartphone, either their personal or work-supplied, provided that they can and sometimes are expected to use it to make calls or record interviews, and create engaging social media content. Furthermore, as the data discussed later discussed shows – the journalists and journalism students understand and even embrace the need for multimedia journalism that can be accessed by using mobile technologies.

There are other factors that affect the mass media and journalistic profession (Örnebring 2010; Kim, Kim 2018), such as economic development. Even in the 1640s news pamphlet printing enabled by previous centuries adapted and improved Gutenberg press was seen as an opportunity for economic gains (Conboy 2004, 31). Additional information grew increasingly critical in business decisions and therefore it became more valuable and with the invention of electricity the news and fast transmission of the news became critical to companies all over the world (Min 2022, 5). Smaller regional newspapers and magazines cannot afford a social media manager, as even the salaries for the employees are not satisfactory (Šulmane, Uzule 2018, 93). So here the convergence is also driven by the economic factors.

It must be noted that “journalists in general seem to view technology and technological development as inevitable, impersonal forces that directly cause many of the changes taking place within journalism,” as written by media scholar Henrik Örnebring (2010, 58), describing how media professionals often will revert to technological determinism when explaining the changes that occur in media and affect their profession. That is echoed by the media researcher Seong Jae Min (2022, 1–5), who notes that sometimes technological effects by journalists and scholars alike are overestimated. He refers to a quote of futurist Roy Amara, stating that people “tend to overestimate the effect of a technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run.” Min explains that initially people are overexcited in positive and also negative ways about the technology, then, as time goes on, they notice flaws and problems, become disappointed with it, while in time the technologies become interwoven in the society. As such, the mobile technologies that are at the centre of this study, have become a part of general society, as well as the daily tool bag of journalists (Salzmann *et al.* 2023, 347).

Nonetheless, the rise of mobile journalism, powered by smartphones, has transformed the journalistic landscape. The ability to capture, access, and disseminate information on the go has expanded the scope of journalistic practice. However, this shift also brings challenges, including the need to adapt to new storytelling formats and navigate the complexities of an increasingly converged media environment. The omnipresence of smartphones in journalism underscores the need for continuous learning and adaptation to fully harness the potential of mobile technologies for news production and audience engagement.

Attitude towards mobile journalism in Latvia

The survey was conducted in November–December of 2023. It gathered responses about mobile journalism, acceptance of this technology and attitudes towards mobile journalism from practising journalists, journalism students and academics who teach communication science students that aspire to be journalists. The project is helmed by the scholars from University of Bucharest and it aims to study more experiences and attitudes from more than 20 Central and East European states, under the title “Mobile Journalism Practice and Education in Central-East European Countries”.

The study was in some ways limited, and in total 100 responses were gathered that were deemed to be valid, and the survey was fully completed. While is not a sufficiently large sample size to yield definite answers and descriptions of journalists and journalism students’ attitudes about mobile journalism, there are certainly a few findings that are interesting enough to be pursued in further, more in-depth studies.

One of the findings shows that more than 80% of respondents in each of the groups agreed that mobile journalism should be a part of education curriculum for journalism students. In the student group around 53% agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, while in the journalist group more than 75% agreed or strongly agreed. 76% of journalists agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that mobile journalism skills are vital for journalists in training, and around 75.5% of students agreed and 77% of academics agreed with this statement.

These two datasets suggest that, while further studies should provide more scrutinised results, validated by other research methods, nevertheless, the fact emerges that all the interested parties see mobile journalism as a valid and essential part of modern journalism. The journalists who practise their craft day by day might see how acquiring mobile journalism skills might help the new journalists. Furthermore, there is a broad agreement from academics who teach this trade, as well as the students of this specialty.

The next question – “Have you personally attended master classes, workshops or lectures about mobile journalism?” introduced some more tension, as

the majority of groups responded with “no”. The second most popular answer was that the respondents had acquired the skills through self-training. That signals a problem, which should be explored in further studies – what are barriers and obstacles for students and journalists, as well as academicians to participate in the mobile journalism classes. There might be multiple factors – lack of time, lack of possibilities (such classes might not be offered/available), they might not see the need for formal education when it can be acquired by doing it on their own (as many survey participants noted), or by learning from social media videos and articles. As this mobile technology is very present and easily accessible there might be some bias in the words the need to learn about it, as it might seem “too easy” or “too simple” or maybe intuitive enough that it does not require special learning time.

The next question concerning journalism – “Has the workplace provided masterclasses or any possibilities to learn?” shed some light on one of the possible explanations, namely – there was not a systemic approach. 63% of journalists say that their workplace has not provided workshops or classes. 23% say they do not know if there has been this possibility. That means that more than 85% of professionals have not had the opportunity to learn about using the mobile journalism tools.

These questions form the broader questionnaire that casts light upon a potential problem in the academic and professional sphere of journalism and learning about the mobile journalism tools.

The second part of this pilot study is composed of eight in-depth interviews conducted in 2020 with journalists and editors from various national and regional media. The journalists and their positions in media in 2020 were: Pauls Raudseps (editor and part-owner of a weekly investigative journal *Ir*), Juris Tihonovs (foreign news editor for the national daily newspaper *Diena*), Linda Rasa (editor-in-chief for daily national newspaper *Latvijas Avīze*), Ingus Bērziņš (editor-in-chief for online news website *Delfi*), Ināra Egle (political correspondent for daily national newspaper *Latvijas Avīze*), Egita Jonāne (journalist for *Latgales Laiks*), Regīna Tamane (editor-in-chief for the regional newspaper *Auseklis*), and Anita Rozentāle (editor-in-chief for the regional newspaper *Bauskas Dzīve*).

The interview subjects were journalists with over 20 years of work experience. All of the interviewees are in the age group from 45 to 60 and most of their professional careers have been dedicated to work in Latvian media as reporters and editors. Most started when Latvia regained independence in 1991. The decision to include journalists with at least 20 or more years of experience was conscious and deliberate. These are the journalists who have experienced various types of media production and creation technologies – starting from the analogue printing press and using typewriters. At the same time, professional photographers are sent out to get pictures, all the way to modern cloud-based

article writing and editing systems. The partially structured interview method enabled conducting a search for correlation in the data and possibly offering some explanations to the questions from the survey.

The interviews partly reveal the converging of roles. Interviews with regional journalist Egita Jonāne from a newspaper *Latgales Laiks* demonstrated a practice that is common in small, local Latvian media – an average journalist does not only write and report, but they take pictures and sometimes even help as proofreaders. Journalists for the newspaper generate content for the website, as well. The journalist remembers when *Latgales Laiks* had a staff photographer, now it is considered too expensive. Similar stories come from other regional outlets. The same adoption of multiple roles can be observed in national media. While larger national news websites, newspapers, magazines still employ staff photographers or have contracts with agencies or freelancers, nevertheless, there are times when a journalist has to take photos or film videos.

Meanwhile, it transpired that journalists generally agree with this order of things – they do not expect a producer or a photographer to accompany them everywhere. Some even suggested that travelling with a multimedia content creator was cumbersome. It is not uncommon for journalists specialising in investigative journalism to document everything they encounter by taking photos, filming, or recording audio materials. Only television journalists still enjoy the cameraman as a companion. Other media-type employees embark on investigative endeavours on their own.

In an interview, an editor-in-chief of the regional daily newspaper *Dzirkstele* Regina Tamane admits that every one of the reporters “just tries to do their best” and, in her estimate, “usually that is enough”. She concedes that the main reason for not having staff multimedia people is money. However, when asked a hypothetical question – if money were not an issue, would you hire one – after a moment of consideration admits that she probably would not. She does not think that there would be enough work that would justify hiring a professional photographer.

This sentiment does not echo throughout the Latvian media environment – journalist and editor from Daugavpils website and a printed daily newspaper talked with regret about not having sufficient financial resources to have multimedia content creators. The earliest of the Daugavpils daily *Latgales Laiks* journalists, Egita Jonāne, as previously mentioned, talked fondly about the past when photographers accompanied journalists. This also can be gleaned from the open-ended questions in the survey. 34% of the respondents believe that there should be a greater financial support for hiring multimedia content creators.

Nevertheless, journalists and editors generally seem to have a pragmatic outlook when talking about monetary issues. They do not want additional spending on technological solutions, even if they would make their job a little

easier. A co-founder, columnist and editor of the weekly magazine *Ir* and an editor of the bi-monthly journal *Ir Nauda* Pauls Raudseps, when asked about the usefulness of the software for streamlining the article writing, editing, and delivering to print, dismissed the idea, saying that for a weekly magazine with a small team it was not needed, while admitting that daily newspapers could benefit from it.

In interviews, editors and journalists adopt a distinctly positive viewpoint when discussing the general influence of digital technologies. The senior foreign news editor for the daily newspaper *Diena* Juris Tihonovs thinks that technologies can make journalism shallow. However, he does not see it as a requirement or a logical development that embraces digital technologies and online journalism. He states that journalists have complete access to information, data, and sources, and superficial reporting is rather caused by laziness. He thinks that technologies are wonderful compared to the time when he set out professionally, when most of the printed press still relied on typewriters and printing press technologies, whilst the first few computers and computer-assisted printing emerged only in the early 1990s. Other interviewed editors agreed –technology did not inherently facilitate or breed “bad journalism”. It resonated with an older survey conducted in 2016, which found that 78% of the surveyed journalists felt that the battles for audiences decreased the general quality of reporting (Rožukalne, 2020). Nonetheless, the overall sentiment was positive. Those who have worked in the field for more than 20 years say that technologies, especially mobile phones and the internet, have greatly empowered journalists. Survey reveals that journalists often like to have these tools at hand, as they allow them to document the events better, and even if the resulting material is not for publishing, it helps them recall things and write or talk about them.

Interviews with older journalists revealed that the “learning as you go” attitude had been around since the 1990s. As journalists have always been busy most of the time, developing new skills and practices has been and still remains on their own shoulders. Rarely does anyone recall any special classes or master courses. Some editors acknowledge that there have been opportunities, but there has not been enough time for journalists to participate. Usually, the skills to use modern technology solutions have been acquired by doing it and using the technology. This has remained true to this day.

While journalists admit that they have no formal training in creating content, editors sometimes see their staff’s lack of skill as a problem – less than half of journalists have attended classes, and those who have, admitted that they do not have the time to immerse themselves in them fully. Meanwhile, as the financial situation is not improving and the technology is more accessible, journalists are thrust into multimedia journalism without the necessary training. This has the potential to bring down the appeal of a final product and thus possibly turn audiences elsewhere.

Conclusions

While this is not a comprehensive study and more data must be collected, the findings signal a couple of important observations that should be worthwhile avenues for further studies.

The survey data, coupled with insights from in-depth interviews, paints a complex picture of the Latvian journalistic landscape in relation to mobile journalism and convergence. While there is a clear recognition of the importance of mobile technologies and a general willingness to embrace them, the practical implementation and skill development remain the areas of concern. The lack of formal training opportunities and systemic support for mobile journalism highlights a potential gap between the theoretical understanding of its importance and the practical realities of its integration into daily journalistic practices. The convergence of roles, particularly in smaller regional media outlets, further underscores the need for comprehensive training and support to ensure that journalists can effectively navigate the multifaceted demands of the digital age.

The findings of this pilot study suggest that while Latvian journalists and journalism students are generally optimistic about the potential of mobile journalism and convergence, there are significant challenges that need to be addressed. The lack of formal training opportunities, coupled with the pressure to produce multimedia content, highlights the need for a more proactive approach to skill development and resource allocation within the industry. Future research should delve deeper into these issues, exploring the barriers to mobile journalism adoption and identifying strategies to facilitate a smoother transition towards a fully converged newsroom culture. The future of journalism in Latvia, as elsewhere, hinges on the ability of journalists and media organizations to adapt to the ever-evolving technological landscape and harness the power of mobile journalism to tell compelling stories and engage with audiences in meaningful ways.

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