# "The Best Camera is the One You Always Have With You": The Case for MOJO-Based Courses and Mobile Production Kits

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"Easy and familiar to use, accessible, and fast" — those are some of the advantages of using one's cell phone to produce news in college, students say (Garyantes & Berkey-Gerard, 2015, p. 40). Almost a decade after this survey, conducted in Fall 2012, and its authors' conclusion that journalism educators should train their students to produce news content with mobile devices, most broadcast programs in the United States still seem to rely primarily on traditional broadcast equipment, i.e. large and heavy tripods, cameras, and lighting kits. Meanwhile, companies have increasingly relied on a mobile production workflow. From scholars finding a rise in U.S.-based television job postings requiring "mobile skills" in the early 2010s (Wenger et al., 2014) to public broadcasters producing news from their smartphones in the United Kingdom (Scott, 2016) and Germany (Young, 2017) to a New Delhi, India, TV station switching their entire newsgathering process to phones (Packer, 2017), the international media industry has bought into what has become known as MOJO – MObile JOurnalism. In fact, "MOJO is considered to be one of the fastest growing areas of journalism" (Salzmann et al., 2020, p. 1). It thus comes as no surprise that scholars have been commenting on the issue for the better part of the past decade, too (e.g., Blankenship, 2016; Kraft & Seely, 2015; Messner, 2013; Salzmann *et al.*, 2021; Van Wyke, 2013).

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has deeply af-fected the broadcasting industry (Canary, 2020; Coche & Lynn, 2020). As journalists were forced home, at least temporarily, in most of the world, newsrooms and sports broadcasters turned to cloud-based and mobile production processes (Aller, 2020; Dawson & Lucas, 2021a; 2021b). The NFL and MLB sent mobile phone production kits to draft prospects for live, in-home coverage of their reaction when draft-ed (Costa, 2020a; Hernandez, 2020). The NHL also used localized mobile production technology as part of their live 2020 draft day coverage (Costa, 2020b). These are key indicators of changes that took place in production practices as a result of the pandemic, and they signal a shift toward tomorrow's produc-tion workflows that will continue to integrate mo-bile phones with traditional production tools (Stone, 2021; SVG, 2021). As mobile phones have become a normal part of broadcast production personnel's workflows, graduates with the ability to work in a MOJO workflow will have a decided advantage over those who do not have that ability.

## The Key Advantage: Accessibility

Pedagogically, mobile phones provide a viable tool for applying Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1954), as well as setting and reaching learning objec-tives (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2012), to teach students the basic technical aspects of camera operation and editing. By using a device they already know, students

should theoretically better focus on the learning objectives of a video production course.

In a sense, using broadcast equipment is akin to adding a confounding variable: it is dividing students' focus between figuring out a new tool and learning the fundamentals aspects of video production. If they can concentrate solely on the latter, they will gain skills they can transfer to other gear. Indeed, image composition is not dependent on the type of camera being used. Rather, it is based on where the camera is placed and how the image is framed (Owens, 2016; Zettel, 2011). In addition, every camera uses three functions to control its image exposure: iris (aperture in photography), shutter, and gain (ISO in photography). Using readily available, free apps, students can access this "exposure triangle" (Crosswhite, 2020) on their phones' cameras, just as they would with a professional broadcast camera. Other apps, many free as well, allow learners to edit their content on their phone using linear timeline features similar to those used by professional editors on computer-based software. Thanks to those free apps, students learn the correct vocabulary and shooting/editing techniques using their phone. If/When they come across an unfamiliar camera, they merely have to identify where the controls are located to shoot effectively – similarly to professionals who learn new gear when they start a new job. In a nutshell, by teaching students shooting and editing concepts using their phone, we provide them with an accessible introduction to the fundamentals of the content creation process.

Further, using all of the available resources effectively aligns with Dewey's methodological philosophy of efficiency in instruction (Dewey, 1923). That is why academic institutions should offer MOJO-specific courses and/or transition their introductory production courses to MOJO-based processes. Without the distraction of learning new equipment, a single semester would provide students with adequate time to demonstrate mastery-level proficiency of basic shooting and editing concepts; and because students learn the conceptual foundations of video production, the MOJO workflow adequately prepares them to move from their phone to a professional content production environment. Now that 96% of Americans aged between 18 and 29 own a smartphone, along with more than 90% of Americans with at least some college education (Pew Research Center, 2021), incorporating students' smartphones into the video production learning process should not cause major accessibility issues. In fact, the rare student who does not own a smartphone could still check out traditional broadcast equipment.

Vital production resources would then be more available for upper-level students who need the traditional equipment, an ideal move considering students enrolled in those courses are more likely to want to work in a professional production environment. Finally, switching introductory courses and/or other production courses to a MOJO format makes production courses more accessible to online students who are often left without access to equipment. Transitioning to a MOJO workflow would thus give online students a more equitable opportunity to develop their skill sets.

## Addressing "Deprofessionalization" Concerns Through Mobile Kits

Some people have questioned the validity of MOJO productions. They argue that traditional cameras and workflows allow for higher-quality content, and that MOJO contributes to the deprofessionalization of broadcast and journalistic work (gradim & Morais, 2020). And research suggests it does (Blankenship, 2014). For instance, traditional cameras can cover a wider range of scenarios than mobile phones with a fixed lens. Yet, as evidenced by the increased MOJO-workflow adoption in the industry (Aller, 2020; Canary, 2020; Dawson & Lucas, 2021a; 2021b; Salzmann *et al.,* 2020), mobile phones can capture many shots used in live and non-live television production environments.

To attain true broadcast-level quality, universities should invest in mobile production kits, i.e. production gear that can be added onto any cell phone, that prepare students for tomorrow's content production environment. Specific recommendations for such a kit are:

- A smartphone stabilizer rig providing easy-to-grip handles (so students can film in a more stable manner) that allows the attachment of a light and a shotgun microphone;
- An on-camera light to film in dark environments;
- A shotgun microphone with windscreen to capture clear audio in the direction the camera is facing;
- A wireless mic to record quality audio when subjects are far from the camera;
- Adapter cables to suit different cell phones;

- A filter kit to improve image quality;
- A tabletop tripod to mount cameras for interviews or time-lapse shots;
- A hard case to protect the gear.

Because such gear is more affordable than traditional broadcast equipment (each complete kit can cost less than $500 for good-quality gear), students could check out a complete kit for a full semester, ensuring they have access to it whenever they need it. Because media production skills come with practice, giving our students access to mobile production kits (to be used with their cell phone) for a semester will likely result in increased marketability and career growth.

Additionally, as remote work and online studies grow, we must innovate to guarantee students of all backgrounds have access to the majors and courses of their choice. Incorporating students' cell phones into the production workflow helps us do that because online students could receive their own equipment kit in the mail. Teaching a production course online is a challenge, but this lighter and smaller gear would help solve equipment accessibility problems. Thanks to the light weight and affordability of this professional-grade gear, course fees would not be any higher than the course fees of other production courses – they could even be lower – all while covering the usual wear and tear as well as shipping costs.

## Conclusion

Few journalism and mass communication students are likely to ever encounter, let alone be expected to master, broadcast production equipment in their jobs. However, they will all use cell phones, regardless of their profession. In the broadcast industry specifically, MOJO workflows were being adopted before COVID-19, and the pandemic accelerated major changes in the industry (Coche & Lynn, 2020). As such, equipping students with the ability to produce content via a MOJO production workflow provides them with usable skills that will serve them beyond the classroom. Because the workflow incorporates students' cell phones, it also minimizes the cost and size of the equipment, and every student can be affordably equipped with a complete set of high-quality production gear. The move would be particularly beneficial to online students, as it would remove a traditional barrier to learning professional content production skills, which will translate into (1) more students being ready to fill media production roles in the industry, and (2) improving the quality of online education programs.

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