



## **Websites as Teaching Tools at the Department of Media Studies of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad: Case Study**

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**Abstract.** The Internet, an independent medium and the basic journalistic tool used in everyday practice is also recognized as a priority in the specialized courses taught at the Department of Media Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. Today, journalism and elementary communication cannot be imagined without the Internet. Due to this fact, the teaching process in this scientific area of knowledge is directed towards the highest degree of theoretical and practical coordination between future journalists and current trends and processes in the cyberspace. For that purpose, three sites have been created. They are used both as teaching tools and public media present at the media scene. These are: the e-papers used in the course Internet journalism, web address for the area of Reporting on natural and caused catastrophes, and the website for the course Media for children, which is especially functional and thorough since teachers, students and children from primary schools, whom the site is intended for, have been involved in all the processes since the initial idea and very beginning. The pages include current affairs, the field of education, communication, entertainment and children's artistic works as well as the tradition and scientific work on media for children, which is a century and a half long in this geographical area. The Department has also opened a web portal, which is multifunctional: it serves as a medium for open media communication and announcements, internal notice board and a source of the necessary information on the work of the Department as well as a server for the other three sites.

**Keywords:** Internet, media, teaching, websites, journalists, students, children, communication

## **Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to present ways in which the Internet as a medium and an essential tool in modern journalism is used in teaching at the Department of Media Studies Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. The paper presents a concrete example of the specific application of new technology, and the scientific method is applied to case studies. It includes an overview of all the details related to the inception and development of ideas on the need to run this procedure and its justification in the context of time and technology, with a detailed review and analysis of all activities involved in the project. The introductory section presents the circumstances in the modern world, as well as in journalism, that initiated a new way of thinking in the organization of instruction in this Department. The following is a concrete analysis, divided into three major sections, each of which deals with specific examples of Internet sites designed for teaching in certain fields of science, and public media for the purpose of this Department.

The age we live in, the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has brought about significant changes in the global concept of communication. Soon, these innovations have appeared and been used both in general and media context. After five long centuries of the so called Gutenberg Galaxy, the whole humanity has made a long way of advancement contributed by fast development of new technologies in the spheres of human work and life in general.

The following computer science age has caused the development of computer culture so that the computer has nowadays become generally used technology, which is taken for granted in the greater part of humanity, while its poorer and less developed part is following this trend slowly but determinedly. General computerization is especially noticeable and unavoidable in the domain of information exchange, communication and mass media, where the use of new technologies is the standard almost completely established long time ago. Since the acceptance of new media is conditioned by technological maturity, cultural needs, as well as the capacities of society (Tapavički and Duronjić, 2008), their implementation implies the development in that society and its willingness to be included into global trends and become a part of them.

## **Today's media**

The development of the high technology has also reorganized the media world so that fundamental changes have affected journalism as well. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, journalists analyze and follow particularly complicated human communities with far more complicated social relations than there were in the past. However, there are tools including modern technology available to journalists, which are the products of the general scientific progress (Krejg, 2005). In spite of this fact,

journalists' task and basic aim has remained the same: conveying the news as accurately and fast as possible.

The global Internet web has significantly changed journalists' job so that it is, technically and technologically speaking, easier. Due to this fact, their job was faced with new challenges concerning ethics and its codices. Thus, a very efficient means of both personal and professional communication is available to a networked journalist. This means that it provides a journalist with almost instantaneous transfer of information to the target, no matter whether the message is intended for an individual or group. On the other hand, the Internet is a rich source of information of all categories. However, this does not mean that they are all perfectly precise and accurate so that they should be carefully accessed.

Except for being a basic professional tool for a journalist, the Internet is also the market for presenting their own or collective product. Journalism is quickly moving to the Internet that is becoming a dominant source of information for the vast majority of people in relation to the classical media, which are not dying off. They are finding various ways for prolonging their life through their cooperation with the new media.

Internet sites mainly include the combination of the written language and photograph as the basic elements for the transfer of information with adequate audio and video recordings that serve, especially in journalism, as a complement or extension of the primarily conveyed news. This kind of multimedia is in accordance with Bill Gates' prediction presented at the World Economy Forum in Davos (Switzerland) in 2007, which claims that, in the following couple of years, the Internet and television will become one. We are witnesses of this everyday merging that is currently taking place simultaneously in front of our eyes.

However, the main innovation in journalism is a consequence of one of the key features of the Internet web – interactivity. The presentation of a journalistic text on the Internet mainly subsumes leaving additional space for the receiver of the information, website visitors and readers to contribute to the general reception of the text in the form of a comment, additional information, recommendation, link to a similar topic or any other multimedia content. In that way, journalists are losing their previous monopoly regarding the collection and presentation of information since the process becomes an open circle in which everyone has a right to participate if they want to and find the way to make a personal contribution.

In that sense, a special role is played by blogs as a kind of individuals' diary entries, which are becoming increasingly important for creating a complete picture of a particular phenomenon due to the publicly expressed opinion or comment on a subject and the offer of the primary information itself. Therefore, editors of informative websites recognize their large role, while the trend of opening separate web addresses is also emphasized. The addresses are available only to bloggers and visitors' communities normally formed around them.

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## Media Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy

The Department of Media Studies was founded at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad in 2004 as the youngest academic and teaching sector for media literacy and training of future generation of educated journalists for the work in media and similar areas, such as communication and public relations as well as media science. Taking into account both the theoretical and practical teaching at this Department from the very beginning, the Internet is recognized as the basic technological tool and necessity in the modern approach to journalism as well as the teaching process of the transfer of knowledge itself.

The theoretical and practical adjustment to the current trends and processes in cyber space is a priority in all areas of study, especially those related to direct learning about journalism. This task does not seem to be too difficult since present generations of students already belong to the so called internet generation born and grown up in the computer science age with computers and the Internet as the basic tools for a large number of activities in modern life especially in relation to communication and the process of collecting, analyzing and presenting information, which is the basis of journalism.

However, there are certain limits regarding primary technological qualification for life in the age of computers' domination. These limits in Serbia originate from the sphere of the adequate and developed infrastructure and variable economic situation. Outside larger urban areas, in smaller towns with a higher percentage of older people, the number of homes with a computer and Internet access is far lower. A case in point is the village of Kruščić, the municipality of Kula in the northern part of the country, which, in 2010, got an open wireless internet access, but the number of homes with a computer is considerably low, i.e. less than 10%.

Being confronted with all positive or negative conditions given above, the Department of Media Studies has created a few websites related to various scientific areas or spheres of journalistic profession. In addition to being actively used as an everyday teaching tool, these sites exist and serve as open public media present at the large media scene in the country as well as outside it.

### E-papers

The first website created to be used in the teaching process was the E-papers of the Department of Media Studies at the web address [www.novine.medijske-studije.org](http://www.novine.medijske-studije.org). The website was built within the subject Internet journalism. In classes and workshops within this subject and after the theoretical introduction provided in lectures, there is a preparation and practical training on the Internet in the field of journalists' work for students through the simulation of a modern and organized

editorial office, whose activities are based on the appliance of modern technologies and that follows the newest trends in journalism in the world. Taking into account the fact that the given web address is publicly available, students are given an opportunity to introduce themselves to a broader media sphere without limits through their work in journalism. The site is, thus, completely dedicated to training in the form of a journalism workshop and an open and active editorial office of an internet medium.

The website has been set up by using the operation system Joomla, software that is very simple to use. That is why it is so popular in the world of computer science where it is often used for the creation of websites for various purposes. The experience of the Department of Media Studies has proved that this operating system is simple and easy for creating, learning, working and public presentation. Besides a professor and teaching assistant, talented students were involved in the creation of the website and they still have an important role as website administrators, while experienced teachers are editors of the website.

Editing policy has been defined so that it meets the needs of the target audience consisting primarily of students directly involved in the process of collecting and presenting the information. The website covers current issues in students' lives in Novi Sad including both the local level and global trends, which are necessary in the work of every journalist. The sections are divided on the basis of genres and topics including the news from politics, economy, society, culture, sport, entertainment, interesting facts and local area issues presented in the form of articles, reports, stories and interviews classified into separate genre sections. The information aspect of the website has been completed by creating a page for bloggers that is necessary for a modern editorial office paying special attention to civic journalism.

The students involved in the work of the editorial office access the website by opening a user account with personal name and password. In that way, they become active participants in the creation of the content at this web address. Through their work supervised by a teaching assistant, an editor, students gain knowledge and experience related to the work in a highly active editorial office as well as the use of certain genres and reporting techniques, conveying of news through various ways of editing an informative website. Being in accordance with the need for internet media, special attention is paid to the visual identity including the text support in the form of adequate photographs and video material, which have to be presented in accordance to the principles of united visualization and uniformity, as it is the case with the text itself. Set up in this way, the e-papers were the only real medium of the Department during the first several years of its existence and work.



Graph 1. E-papers of the Department of Media Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad

## Media for children

At the Department of Media Studies, one of the studied subjects is Media for children, a unique course including all academic and educational institutions dealing with journalism and media analysis. The main reason for this is a 150-year long tradition of publishing various media contents intended for the target audience in Vojvodina, especially in the urban centers Sombor and Novi Sad. The first written and illustrated magazines for children were published in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, such as *A Friend of Serbian Youngsters*, *Children's Friend*, *Radovan* and *Pigeon*, while *Marigold* was created in 1880 in Novi Sad and soon won great popularity; it has been published ever since with a short discontinuation.

The tradition of media for children was successfully continued in the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the spread of electronic media, radio and television. Radio and television Vojvodina, a public service, has paid great attention to the content for children for decades so that children have had the opportunity to grow up learning through radio and television programs abounding in documentary and entertaining shows intended for children.

Respecting that tradition and being aware of the need for the youngest members of our society to be involved in the media sphere, which they belong to, the Department decided to create a website within the course Media for children, which would serve as e-papers for children in primary schools. Relying on previous experience gained through the creation of the Department's e-papers, a completely new website was set up at the web address [www.5sazvezdicom.medijскеstudije.org](http://www.5sazvezdicom.medijскеstudije.org).

The website was built with the participation of professors, teaching assistants, and students involved in studying Media for children including children aged 8–11, who were marked as the target audience in the preparatory analysis in accordance with the desired degree of their cognitive development. In addition to theoretical and practical knowledge gained through the analysis of world and domestic scene of the media for children conducted within the course, the final results concerning the need for the website were obtained by surveying children in a large number of primary schools in the province. The analysis of the results obtained in the research and survey has provided the picture of the future website with creative, educational and entertaining content including the reduced space for marketing, games and other media products that are aggressively and unethically presented, badly affecting children's growing up during the preadolescent period.

The operating system Joomla in a new edition was again used for setting up the website designed to attract the attention of young visitors in an imaginative and funny way, while the choice of sections had the purpose of a long stay at the given address. In addition to the sections News, Interesting Issues, World of the Famous, and Where to Go to Have Fun dealing with current issues from the lives of children in primary schools and created by students, the website includes the section Your Works in which students can publish their literary or art works. Following the principle of interactivity, there is the section Discussions, supervised by an administrator, in which visitors can comment on previously read texts and raise new topics according to the areas they are interested in.

The section set up first, Dragon's Nook, is dedicated to the memory of the great writer of children poetry and the founder of the magazine Marigold, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, which showed the need of the course to pay attention to other people who dedicated their media work to children so that they are given an adequate section of the website. This is the reason why the section Collections of Works contains interviews with a large number of journalists whose work is related to the media for children especially in the last decades in Vojvodina and other parts

of the country. The interviewers were students using typical questions with the aim of throwing light on the motives and methods for dealing with children's topics in different media contents. The interviewees were the best known people working in the media for children, such as the writer and journalist Raša Popov, poet Pero Zubac and a famous TV presenter Minja Subota.

In the sections Analysis and Scientific Paper, a large number of seminar papers, graduation and other academic papers were published. They were created through theoretical and practical work on the topic of media for children within the course. The content of the website also includes domestic and foreign law regulations on children's rights in general as well as the obligations that journalists owe to their youngest audience. In this way, the website subsumes all fields related to media for children as well as all participants important for this type of media so that this course is completely developed by the use of the website.



Graph 2. E-papers for students in primary schools



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## **The portal**

Due to the positive results from the previous experience, the Department has created another website with educational and information content, intended for teaching and its results within the course Reporting on natural and caused catastrophes. At the established address [www.krize.medijskestudije.org](http://www.krize.medijskestudije.org), students, professors, teaching assistants and teaching associates' works are published. They are related to this specific area of journalism. The website is updated in accordance with the work dynamics within the course and the results achieved in teaching and journalistic work.

The peak of the implementation of websites in teaching and the organization of work at the Department of Media Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad was the creation of the portal that will subsume the whole previous experience and already established websites for teaching and information purposes. This time, the operating system Word-Press was used for setting up the website since it is a more modern platform specialized for web publishing with high standards concerning the design and use. The portal has been set up at the web address [www.medijskestudije.org](http://www.medijskestudije.org) having numerous purposes. Primarily, it is a medium intended for broad media communication and presentation and it is a product that the Department presents to the media scene in Serbia and in general. Simultaneously, the portal acts as an internal medium or notice board with up-to-date information related to subjects and exams as well as the source of the needed information about the Department's work. It is also a server for the other three websites.

## **Conclusion**

Almost all segments of the organization and functioning of today's society in the technologically developed world are faced with the necessary use of computers and the Internet as the dominant space for all forms of the basic personal or general communication. This trend is especially emphasized in the domain of media, while journalism today cannot be imagined without the elementary reliance on the domain of computer science. Thus, teaching in academic institutions that educate new generations of journalists is confronted with the necessary inclusion of new media and technology into all aspects of organization and work.

Positive experience and the example of the Department of Media Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad imply that the implementation of websites in the teaching process is the only possible way to keep up with global trends that are rapidly changing, especially in journalism that requires obligatory presence of all sources of news and current affairs. Today, they are found on the Internet so that for a modern man, especially a journalist or student of journalism, the access to the

Internet and active life with it are the priorities and, as it can be concluded, already established standards.

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