



Perceptions of Filmmakers on Audiovisual Production with Smartphones in Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: *Smartphones* have become key tools in independent audiovisual production in Latin America due to their accessibility, portability, and technical flexibility. In contexts with limited budgets, these devices have democratized audiovisual creation, enabling narrative and technical innovations. This study analyzes the perceptions of short film directors in Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. **Methodology:** Using a qualitative approach, 18 directors with experience in using *smartphones* were selected, with their productions featured in specialized festivals such as Mobile Film Latam and Ojo Móvil Fest. Semi-structured interviews explored their practices, reflections, and challenges. **Results:** Participants highlighted advantages such as portability, low cost, and technical flexibility, as well as their impact on innovative narratives and spontaneous visual captures. However, they pointed out technical limitations, such as editing and post-production challenges, and mentioned that certain industry sectors still perceive productions made with *smartphones* as amateur and lacking professionalism. **Discussion and conclusions:** The study shows that *smartphones* are transforming independent audiovisual production in Latin America. It proposes integrating these technologies into formal higher education in audiovisual communication and emphasizes the role of specialized festivals in legitimizing their use in the professional industry.

Keywords: Smartphones; Independent audiovisual production; Smartphone filmmaking; Audiovisual narratives; Latin America; Mobile film festivals; Self-taught mobile filmmaking.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. State of the art: audiovisual production with smartphones

Since its beginnings, cinema has been closely linked to the technological development of cameras. Even before the Lumière brothers unveiled their cinematograph in 1895, inventors such as Louis Le Prince and Thomas Alva Edison were exploring ways to capture and reproduce moving images. Throughout the 20th century, the motion picture camera evolved significantly, with advances such as the incorporation of sound and color, the emergence of portable cameras, and the transition from celluloid to digital (Beugnet, 2022). Each of these milestones not only expanded creative possibilities, but also changed the dynamics of production and distribution, making film more accessible to independent creators (Sinwell, 2020).

The development of Super 8 in the 1960s, for example, marked a turning point by providing an inexpensive, portable camera that facilitated home and experimental production. Similarly, the advent of video in the 1980s allowed independent filmmakers to explore new narrative and aesthetic forms, while the leap to digital in the following decades revolutionized editing and further democratized access to the tools of audiovisual creation (Beugnet, 2022). These historical developments paved the way for the groundwork for a more recent transformation: using smartphones as production tools (Atkinson, 2021; Schleser, 2023; Yucra, 2022).

In the 21st century, smartphones represent the natural evolution of camera technology towards more compact alternatives for audiovisual production (Schleser, 2023). Thus, more than simple communication devices, these smartphones integrate advanced cameras capable of recording in 4K, highly sensitive sensors, and applications for editing and post-production (Blahnik & Schindelbeck, 2021; Nevsky et al., 2023). Their portability, affordable cost, and instant connectivity have enabled both professional and amateur filmmakers to use these tools to tell stories at a high technical and creative level (Atkinson, 2021, p. 202; Schleser, 2023; Staver, 2020).

A clear example of this transition is Michael Koerbel's short film "Apple of My Eye" (2010), which was recorded entirely on an iPhone 4 and marked a milestone in smartphone filmmaking. This was followed by "Olive" (2011), directed by Patrick Gales and Hooman Khalili, using an adapted Nokia N8 with a cinematic lens (Riley, 2024). These productions evidence how independent filmmakers found in smartphones a viable medium for exploring new narratives and modes of production (De-Frutos-Torres et al., 2020; Sinwell, 2020; Staver, 2020).

Today, smartphones have benefited from a wide range of accessories and applications that optimize their use in the audiovisual field. Tools such as Filmic Pro or Blackmagic Camera allow for manual control of smartphone camera functions, while stabilizers, microphones, and specialized lenses have increased the technical potential of these devices (Blahnik & Schindelbeck, 2021; Viñolo, 2019). This development has allowed productions such as Sean Baker's "Tangerine" (2015) (Macintosh, 2023; Zaza, 2022) or Steven Soderbergh's "Unsane" (2018) to break traditional industry paradigms and consolidate smartphones as valid tools for professional filmmaking (Beugnet, 2022).

Despite the progress in the use of the smartphone as a tool for audiovisual creation and its growing acceptance among independent filmmakers, the analysis of existing literature highlights that most of the studies on these devices are oriented towards their use as consumer tools. This approach leaves a significant gap in the research on their impact on production methods and audiovisual narratives (Arteaga-Huarcaya et al., 2022; Peng & Zhu, 2020). This gap is even more noticeable in the context of Latin America, where smartphones have proven to be key tools to democratize audiovisual production, especially in resource-limited scenarios. In this sense, this study aims to contribute to filling this gap and to open new lines of research that address the specificities of smartphone usage in independent filmmaking in the region.

1.2. Defining the smartphone as a mobile device

When we talk about mobile devices, we refer to a set of communication devices that have the ability to connect to the Internet and have a built-in digital camera, such as smartphones, tablets, drones, and 360° cameras, among others (Ashtari et al., 2022; Bunardi & Prestianta, 2023; Kolesnikov, 2022). In addition, their portability makes them easy to use for content generation.

In this paper, we will focus only on smartphones, as we believe that each of the different mobile devices has its own unique and diverse features that must be studied in depth. Smartphones enter a category of telecommunications in which they are interconnected to multiple media (Zamora, 2023), such as email, social networks, and geolocation, which moves them away from being understood only as simple phones (Márquez, 2019).

Although it is true that smartphones were not initially intended for audiovisual production, with technological progress many filmmakers began to experiment with the technical possibilities of the integrated video camera (Georgiou & Leurs, 2022; Nevsky et al., 2023). Thus, we find two types of smartphones most used according to the operating system: Android and iPhone. Although other operating systems such as Windows 10 Mobile, Symbian OS and Firefox OS appeared in the smartphone market, the first two mentioned are the most popular. In addition, a greater offer of specialized mobile applications in audiovisual production has been developed for both systems, although in most cases they are not compatible with each other, with a greater offer of specialized applications for iPhone (Fadilah, 2023; Joseph, 2022).

1.3. Regional context: The challenges of audiovisual production in Latin America

In Latin America, many audiovisual productions are produced independently and self-financed, with limited budgets (Rodríguez, 2020; West, 2020). In this way, the smartphone allows filmmakers to have access to alternative forms of production (Loubna, 2022), with a small team and that provides a high visual quality.

Films such as "Oso Polar" (2017) by Marcelo Tobar, recorded with an iPhone 5s (Blanco, 2022; García-Defez, 2023), and "Sin Vagina Me Marginan" (2017) by Wesley Verástegui, recorded with an iPhone 6 (Ormeño, 2019), illustrate how smartphones have transcended their technical limitations to become visual storytelling tools. These productions not only explore new narrative and aesthetic possibilities but also highlight the ability of mobile devices to democratize production in contexts of limited resources.

1.3.1. Prejudices about mobile production and informal learning

Despite their growing popularity among independent filmmakers, smartphones face persistent skepticism in the most purist circles of the audiovisual industry. This skepticism has a direct impact on their exclusion from both professional production and formal teaching programs in audiovisual communication (Loubna, 2022; Rodríguez, 2020).

Most filmmakers who choose to film with these devices acquire their skills self-taught, using online tutorials or through hands-on experimentation (Churchill, 2020; Hidayat-Ur-Rehman, 2024). This training gap highlights the need for training spaces specialized in the use of the smartphone as a tool for audiovisual creation, bridging the gap between necessary media skills and new creative opportunities.

1.3.2. Validation and professionalization through mobile film festivals

Mobile film festivals have played a crucial role in legitimizing the use of smartphones as professional tools in audiovisual production (Karbaum Padilla et al., 2024; Vallejo, 2020). Events such as Mobile Film Latam in Colombia, SmartFilms in Mexico and Colombia, and Ojo Móvil Fest in Peru have not only provided exhibition platforms, but also promoted practical learning through workshops, conferences, and competitions (Campos-Rabadán, 2020).

These spaces not only make mobile productions visible but also create a precedent in the industry by highlighting films that have been awarded or selected in international festivals (Perilla & Pinzón, 2022). For example, "Oso Polar" is the first film recorded with a smartphone to win the Guadalajara International Film Festival, one of the most important festivals in Mexico. It is worth noting that Marcelo Tobar's film competed with other films recorded with conventional cameras (Pradilla Barrero, 2020).

Another case worth highlighting is "Cinema Inferno" (2019) by Rafael Arévalo, a low-budget film that went unnoticed by mainstream festivals in Peru. However, it found its place in alternative festivals such as the Ojo Móvil Fest, where it won the award for Best Feature Film. In this way, these festivals establish a quality standard and promote new talents among independent filmmakers seeking to carve out a space in the audiovisual sector (Andrews, 2010; Karbaum Padilla et al., 2024).

The following table highlights audiovisual productions from Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Peru produced with smartphones that have won awards at local and international festivals.

Table 1. Outstanding feature and short films from Argentina (Arg), Colombia (Col), Mexico (Mex), and Peru (Per) recognized at various international festivals.

Country	Title	Directed by	Year	Type	Relevancy
Arg	Tierra Perdida (Lost Land)	Juan Cruz Caricati	2019	Short	Official selection of the 17 th edition of the Mobile Film Festival
Arg	Murciélagos	Hernán Guerschuny et al	2020	Feature	Official selection of the Mar del Plata International Film Festival
Col	Sangre y Levadura	Juan Pablo Urrego	2015	Short	Winner at the SmartFilms Colombia Festival, Second Edition
Col	Hicimos una película	Miguel Urrutia	2022	Feature	Winner of the Best Feature Film Award at SmartFilms Colombia 2022
Col	Gigantes del Pacífico	Mateo Moya	2024	Short	Winner in the Colombian Professional category in SmartFilms Colombia 2024
Mex	Oso Polar	Marcelo Tobar	2017	Feature	Winner of the Mezcal Award for Best Mexican Film at Guadalajara International Film Festival
Mex	Va por Diego	Miguel Flatow	2021	Short	Award for Best Feature Film Recorded with a Mobile Phone at the Cannes World Film Festival.

Mex	El Huracán Ramírez vs. La Piñata Enchilada	Tania Verduzco and Adrián Pérez	2023	Short	Official selection at the Morelia International Film Festival.
Per	Sin vagina, me marginan	Wesley Verástegui	2017	Feature	Nominated for best film at the III Cinema Week of the University of Lima
Per	Cinema Inferno	Rafael Arévalo	2019	Feature	Winner for Best Film at the II Ojo Móvil Fest
Per	El TikTok de Ale	Walter Freddy Manrique Cervantes	2020	Short	Winner of the Best Film at the II Ojo Móvil Fest

Source: Own elaboration.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:

General objective: To explore the perceptions and practices of short film directors from Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Peru on the use of smartphones in audiovisual production, with an analysis of their advantages, limitations and learnings.

The following specific objectives are derived from the general objectives:

O1: To identify the directors' perceptions about the technical, narrative and aesthetic advantages and limitations of the use of smartphones in independent audiovisual production in Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Peru.

O2: To examine the learning and training experiences, both academic and self-taught, that the interviewed directors consider key to using smartphones in audiovisual production.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research falls within the interpretive paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018), is nonexperimental in nature, and is descriptive cross-sectional in scope with a qualitative approach (Corbetta et al., 2010; Flick, 2007). The interpretive paradigm seeks to understand the values, beliefs, and meanings of social phenomena from the description and understanding of the individual, the unique, the particular, the singular, the uniqueness of the phenomena, rather than the generalizable and universal (Kim, 2021). According to Sampieri et al. (2010), the interpretive paradigm favors qualitative methods such as case studies, interviews, and observations because they are the best for understanding how people interpret the world around them. In this sense, this approach is justified because it allows the exploration of the subjective perceptions and practices of the filmmakers interviewed, which is adequate to understand the nuances of the use of smartphones in audiovisual production in different cultural and economic contexts in Latin America.

The technique chosen was the semi-structured interview (Corbetta et al., 2010; Flick, 2007; Kvale, 2011), which responds to pre-defined objectives in order to address key aspects of the use of smartphones in audiovisual production, such as technical, narrative, aesthetic advantages and learning methods. To this end, a script was designed for the operation and collection of data, which was divided into five related thematic blocks: i) experience in producing with smartphones, ii) main concepts related to audiovisual production with smartphones, iii) techniques and resources used for production with smartphones, iv) overview of audiovisual production with smartphones in Latin America and by country, and v) recommendations for audiovisual production with smartphones. This provided a guideline for the data collection stage (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Two pilot interviews were also conducted to ensure that participants understood the questions correctly. The data collection instrument was then improved and administered to the principals in the sample.

The selection of participants was carried out through non-probability judgment sampling, taking into consideration criteria of regional diversity as well as demonstrable prior experience. A database of 68 experts from Latin America was created. The data of these experts were obtained through the databases provided by the international film and video festival with mobile devices: Ojo Móvil Fest from Peru and the film festival for audiovisual content creators with smartphones: Mobile Film Latam from Colombia. These events, specialized in mobile cinema, stand out for the promotion of audiovisual production with smartphones, not only encouraging narrative and technical innovation, but also providing a standard of professional validation in the field of mobile cinema in Latin America.

From this initial base, a preselection was made based on criteria of regional diversity and previous experience in audiovisual production with smartphones. Twenty-five participants who met the defined criteria were contacted by e-mail and in successive rounds, of which 18 short film directors from Colombia (n=4), Mexico (n=3), Argentina (n=5) and Peru (n=6) were interviewed. The selection criteria were (i) to have produced at least one short film using smartphones, (ii) to have been part of the official selection of festivals specialized in mobile cinema, in this case: Ojo Móvil Fest or Mobile Film Latam, and (iii) to have experienced formal or informal learning processes related to audiovisual production.

Regarding the decision to select Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Peru as representative countries responds to their outstanding participation in the Ojo Móvil Fest and Mobile Film Latam festivals, where they not only registered the highest number of participants, but also won the most laureates. These countries not only reflect the massive adoption of mobile cinema, but also provide cultural and economic diversity, allowing for a comparative analysis that enriches the understanding of the use of smartphones in independent audiovisual production in Latin America. This selection strategy made it possible to build a representative sample that reflects both the geographic diversity, and the cultural and audiovisual production contexts of the countries studied.

Interviews were conducted via video calls, e-mail, and digital files. Prior to the start of each interview, the research process was explained to the interviewees and verbal consent was obtained from the participants for all interviews to be recorded (Cohen et al., 2007). The 18 interviews were recorded for over 16 hours, 240 pages were transcribed, and this material was considered confidential.

The age of the participants ranged from 22 to 42 years old, a demographic group that combines emerging young people and professionals with consolidated experience in independent audiovisual production, ensuring diverse perspectives on the use of smartphones in this field.

During the interviews, the researcher ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviewees through alphanumeric coding and anonymization of comments (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 201).

The analysis of results was conducted using thematic analysis. First, all interviews were transcribed, which is a crucial step in data analysis (Cohen et al., 2007). To analyze the data, the six stages of thematic analysis (TA) proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were then carried out to identify, interpret, and define categories (themes).

TA is a flexible method that provides detailed descriptions of educational phenomena (Xu & Zammit, 2020). Information was coded and categorized to identify text passages with a theme and relate it to a code that served as shorthand reference to thematic idea (Gibbs et al., 2012).

Reliability was achieved through transcript review and code cross-checking (Gibbs et al., 2012; Wood & Smith, 2018). Validity was achieved through researcher triangulation, interviewee validation, and constant comparison (Cáceres, 2008; Gibbs et al., 2012; Vaismoradi et al., 2013; Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2019).

Below, we present a table of participants that highlights diversity in terms of gender and nationalities. This table reflects a balance between male and female perspectives, as well as a proportional representation of the countries studied. This approach ensures that the analyzed experiences and perceptions include a variety of cultural, creative, and technical approaches to smartphone-based audiovisual production.

Table 2. Participants' data.

Interviewees	Gender	Year of birth	Country
I1	Male	1996	Peru
I2	Male	2002	Peru
I3	Male	1982	Peru
I4	Male	1983	Peru
I5	Female	1992	Peru
I6	Female	1999	Peru
I7	Female	1997	Mexico
I8	Male	1982	Mexico
I9	Male	1997	Mexico
I10	Male	1996	Colombia
I11	Male	—	Colombia
I12	Female	1997	Colombia
I13	Female	—	Colombia
I14	Male	1975	Argentina
I15	Female	1975	Argentina
I16	Male	1984	Argentina

I17	Female	1989	Argentina
I18	Male	1979	Argentina

Source: Own elaboration.

Note: The missing data in the cells marked with "—" correspond to information not provided by the interviewees during the data collection process and do not affect the qualitative analysis of the interviews.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Overview of mobile audiovisual production in Latin America

4.1.1. Argentina

The experts consulted indicate that the use of smartphones to make short films has not yet been widely adopted in the professional sector. While some filmmakers have started using these devices for independent projects, the Argentine audiovisual industry is still conservative. "I think the power of mobile devices is not being taken advantage of so much. Some time ago, I was hired to take photos or record video with a cell phone, which seemed frowned upon at the time" (Interview 18, Argentina, 2023).

However, the interviewees emphasized that smartphones offer significant advantages to reduce costs in audiovisual production, particularly for independent projects: "A possibility to reduce production costs, without necessarily reducing the costs of the people working on the project" (Interview 18, Argentina, 2023). They also highlighted how these devices provide access to technological tools: "The audiovisual sector is constantly growing and there are always novelties and new tools to share and use in daily work" (Interview 15, Argentina, 2023).

From a professional standpoint, mobile devices have not yet reached a significant level of acceptance in Argentine film production. According to the interviewees, the country's audiovisual sector still perceives its use as less important than other countries in the region: "From my experience, I think it does not have much weight, especially in Latin America. Perhaps the one that can have a greater influence is Brazil, since there have been numerous film productions in various formats there" (Interview 17, Argentina, 2023).

4.1.2. Colombia

This country stands out for the positive impact of events such as SmartFilms, which has encouraged the use of smartphones for producing short films since 2015: "I think it is the strongest festival in that respect because it receives a lot of attention precisely because it was through cell phones, and many people had the opportunity to participate" (Interview 13, Colombia, 2023). The event encourages young directors to explore the cinematographic potential of mobile devices: "This shows how the mobile phone is increasingly being accepted and valued in the audiovisual industry, and festivals are betting on it" (Interview 12, Colombia, 2023).

Despite this progress, interviewees admit that smartphone usage in Colombia remains limited to a small niche due to the accessibility of high-end devices: "Maybe it is a trend that has emerged in the last 4 or 5 years, but it all depends on filmmakers' capacity to acquire high-end equipment" (Interview 11, Colombia, 2023).

Participants also noted that although smartphones have democratized audiovisual creation to some extent, traditional equipment remains the preference: "Most people still prefer to record with a camera, whether an SLR or one dedicated to production" (Interview 11, Colombia, 2023).

4.1.3. Mexico

Interviewed participants emphasize that smartphones are becoming more prevalent in independent audiovisual production, particularly among young filmmakers who view these devices as accessible tools: "I teach at a film school and there are many students who do not have a professional computer to work with or a camera" (Interview 9, Mexico, 2023). The continuous improvement in smartphone image quality has been a key factor in their market acceptance: "I feel that there is an opening towards using the cell phone as a camera. Before, it used to be just another option, but now more there are jobs [...] being done with cell phones" (Interview 7, Mexico, 2023).

However, the interviewees recognize that the standardization of smartphone usage in the Mexican film industry is still in progress, largely depending on the technological quality and narratives these devices can offer: "I think it will be a matter of time before cell phone usage for production becomes standardized worldwide" (Interview 8, Mexico, 2023).

4.1.4. Peru

The smartphone usage for audiovisual production is an alternative mode that empowers many independent filmmakers: "Here in Peru, especially for those without access to high-quality cameras, using a cell phone to make films is a valuable option" (Interview 3, Peru, 2023). This approach is clearly exemplified in the 2017 film *Sin Vagina Me Marginan*, directed by Wesley Verástegui: "The production quality achieved is remarkable, matching professional standards for its exceptional handling of lighting and outstanding cinematography" (Interview 5, Peru, 2023).

According to the interviewees, smartphone film production experienced a remarkable boom in Peru during the pandemic: "During the confinement, people created with what they had on hand, and many had their phones at their disposal. But now that we can go out more and have a little more budget, I think interest has decreased" (Interview 1, Peru, 2023).

Conversely, another participant believes that cinema made with mobile devices is still at an early stage: "Although some filmmakers are experimenting with this form of production, it has not yet been consolidated as a common practice." (Interview 5, Peru, 2023).

The comparative table below summarizes the common and differentiating aspects in the adoption and practice of smartphone-based audiovisual production in Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. It allows identifying the perceived advantages, challenges, and limitations, as well as current trends in video editing and positions regarding vertical video. Additionally, it examines the distribution channels preferred by creators in these four countries. This comparative approach provides a clear picture of how each country is dealing with the changing landscape of film production in the digital age.

Table 3. A comparison of perceptions of smartphone audiovisual production preferences in four Latin American countries.

Aspect	Peru	Colombia	Mexico	Argentina
Perceived Advantages	- Greater privacy when recording. - Portability and discretion in recording.	- Creative flexibility. - Ability to capture authentic moments.	- Immediate recording. - Ease of use for short-duration projects.	- Ability to experiment with new aesthetics and narratives.
Challenges/Limitations	- Screen size for editing. - Limited storage capacity.	- Lack of advanced editing applications. - Need for additional equipment to achieve professional quality.	- Difficulty editing due to screen size. - Video quality limitations in older models.	- Resistance to adoption due to generational factors. - Preference for traditional equipment for complex projects.
Trends in Video Editing	- Use of simple applications for social networks. - Preference for computer editing for complex projects.	- Experiments with mobile applications for quick editing. - Search for hybrid solutions (mobile-computer).	- Preference for editing on larger devices (tablets/computers).	- Leveraging mobile applications for short-format content.
Opinions about Vertical Video	- Skepticism towards adoption. - Preference for traditional formats.	- Openness to experimentation. - Recognition of their popularity on digital platforms.	- Interest in exploring new narratives. - Recognition of its relevance in current consumption.	- Debate on its applicability and aesthetics. - Interest in specific film festivals.
Distribution Channels Used	- Online festival platforms. - Immediate distribution through digital platforms.	- Digital platforms as the main distribution channel. - Experimentation with streaming platforms.	- Distribution on specialized platforms. - Use YouTube for broad reach.	- Broadcasting preference on digital platforms. - Seeking visibility at international festivals.

Source: Own elaboration.

4.2. Adaptation of mobile devices in the audiovisual production process

By asking experts about their diverse experiences using smartphones as recording tools and the opportunities and challenges they identified in independent audiovisual production, we identified a number of key themes that illustrate how smartphones are redefining creative, narrative and technical processes in independent audiovisual production. These themes are presented below and organized into categories ranging from aesthetic exploration to the impact of specialized festivals.

4.2.1. Aesthetic and narrative exploration with smartphones

Smartphones facilitate innovative exploration from an aesthetic perspective thanks to their portability and technical versatility. Thus, the possibility of rediscovering audiovisual language has allowed creators to experiment with unconventional approaches that would be difficult to achieve with traditional equipment: "Using a mobile device allowed me to experiment with angles and shots that would be difficult with traditional equipment. The portability and accessibility of the phone made the process more spontaneous and creative" (Interview 2, Peru, 2023).

In addition, the interviewees highlighted how these tools have opened up new narrative possibilities because the relationship with the screen is much closer than with any other camera. "For me, an important audiovisual project I made with a mobile device involved exploring new narrative and visual techniques" (Interview 18, Argentina, 2023).

4.2.2. Technological innovations and their impact on audiovisual production

Technological advances in smartphone cameras have significantly changed the way filmmakers' approach audiovisual production. Improvements in optics and sensors, the result of collaborations between mobile device manufacturers and companies specializing in imaging technology, have raised the quality of these devices to levels that rival professional equipment: "The fact that we have such a useful portable camera is impressive. Even this iPhone 7, which is more than 12 years old, can record in 4K at 60 frames per second" (Interview 1, Peru, 2023).

Similarly, interviewees emphasized that these devices facilitate creative exploration and the search for new narratives and aesthetics: "When cameras with advanced lenses started to come out for phones, a world of possibilities opened up. You don't have to worry so much about technical limitations; you can focus on narratives" (Interview 4, Peru, 2023).

In addition, this has made it possible to overcome traditional barriers, such as access to expensive equipment, thus democratizing audiovisual creation: "With a good phone and some accessories, you can create quality content. You don't need a big investment to start" (Interview 3, Colombia, 2023).

On the other hand, smartphones, as lightweight and compact technologies compared to other video equipment, provide portability that brings the filmmaker closer to the camera: "The ability to film anytime and anywhere without the need for heavy equipment has completely changed my approach to audiovisual production" (Interview 3, Peru, 2023). Also: "[...] the ease of filming at any time, which I think adds a layer of authenticity and spontaneity to the projects that is not so easy to achieve with traditional cameras" (Interview 14, Argentina, 2023).

4.2.3. The rise of vertical cinema: a new audiovisual language

The versatility of the smartphone is also reflected in the emergence of a new format: *vertical cinema*, an innovative trend in the audiovisual field that adapts to the conventional position with which one usually holds the smartphone in one's hand. This format forces us to rethink framing and visual narratives: "We spent several hours a day watching vertical content, so when I learned that there were film festivals specifically for this type of format, it gave me a lot of ideas. [...] telling stories vertically can symbolize something special" (Interview 6, Peru, 2023).

This vertical format reformulates part of the audiovisual language itself, as the framing cuts off the sides and enlarges the bottom and top: "There are already projects that have been filmed in vertical cinema and have been successful, like Ale's TikTok, which has won many festivals and has traveled around the world" (Interview 5, Peru, 2023).

However, not all filmmakers are enthusiastic about this format: "It's not bad, but I like the horizontal format better because I'm a movie lover and I like the way it looks in that format" (Interview 16, Argentina, 2023).

4.2.4. Technical challenges and editing limitations

Despite advances in mobile technology, participants identified technical challenges, particularly in video editing. They cited screen size and storage capacity among the main limitations: "Not for editing, because at least the phone I have doesn't have a lot of capacity. I know there are people who are very capable of doing things on the phone, editing there" (Interview 1, Peru, 2023).

However, some interviewees consider smartphones to be suitable for simple or short audiovisual projects, but do not see them as ideal tools for complex editing: "I wouldn't consider doing a complete edit on a mobile phone, except by the use of specific tools" (Interview 4, Peru, 2023).

4.2.5. Instant distribution and its impact on mobile cinema

The ability to share content instantly is another of the main advantages of smartphones, facilitating the distribution of short films on different digital platforms: "The ease of use and the immediacy of sharing the work with the world is unparalleled" (Interview 4, Peru, 2023).

This feature makes this mobile device a complete tool for independent filmmakers, from recording to broadcasting: "The immediacy and ease of use have allowed me to capture stories in the moment, something that would be more complicated with traditional equipment" (Interview 11, Colombia, 2023).

4.2.6. Mobile festivals as drivers of smartphone cinema

Festivals dedicated to the promotion and recognition of this format have been key spaces in promoting the acceptance of smartphones as valid and creative tools in audiovisual production. In particular, events such as Mobile Fest Latam in Colombia, SmartFilms in Colombia and Mexico, and Ojo Móvil Fest in Peru have allowed independent filmmakers to experiment with the technical and narrative capabilities of these devices.

These festivals not only legitimize the use of smartphones in audiovisual creation, but also promote their use by providing an exhibition space: "SmartFilms was a great opportunity to show that incredible things can be done with a mobile phone. It was the first festival that really gave visibility to this form of creation" (Interview 10, Colombia, 2023).

According to interviewees, festivals have been a catalyst for mobile devices to be seen as legitimate tools in the industry: "I think events like the Ojo Móvil Fest are setting an important trend. Before it was thought that mobile cinema was amateurish, but these festivals show that there is quality and creativity in this format" (Interview 5, Peru, 2023).

In addition, mobile festivals promote practical learning through workshops, conferences, cultural exchanges, and competitions, which contribute to the development of technical skills: "I had the opportunity to attend a workshop at SmartFilms and I learned how to take better advantage of the capabilities of my cell phone. It was an experience that helped me understand the potential of this technology" (Interview 13, Mexico, 2023).

4.3. Learning from independent filmmakers in audiovisual production with smartphones

In terms of the responses obtained to the question of how independent filmmakers learned the skills necessary to use the smartphone in audiovisual creation, we identified three main themes:

4.3.1. Learning methods: Formal and informal

Of the 18 experts interviewed, only 4 received formal training through workshops and specialized courses. The remaining 14 developed their skills in a self-taught manner, using online resources and exploring intuitively: "Well, by researching, investigating, googling and watching the experiences of professionals on YouTube, I learned how to use the phone itself and how it was used..." (Interview 8, Mexico, 2023).

Access to technological resources and digital platforms has allowed more people, regardless of their educational or economic background, to learn autonomously: "From a young age, at 15, I started to venture into video recording with my cell phone..." (Interview 2, Peru, 2023).

4.3.2. Challenges of self-taught learning

Although informal learning facilitates access to basic knowledge, some interviewees pointed out the importance of formal guidance to take full advantage of the full potential of smartphones: "The good thing about these tools is that they're not expensive, they're very accessible. [...] It's a simple and basic kit to upgrade the tools on your phone" (Interview 6, Peru, 2023).

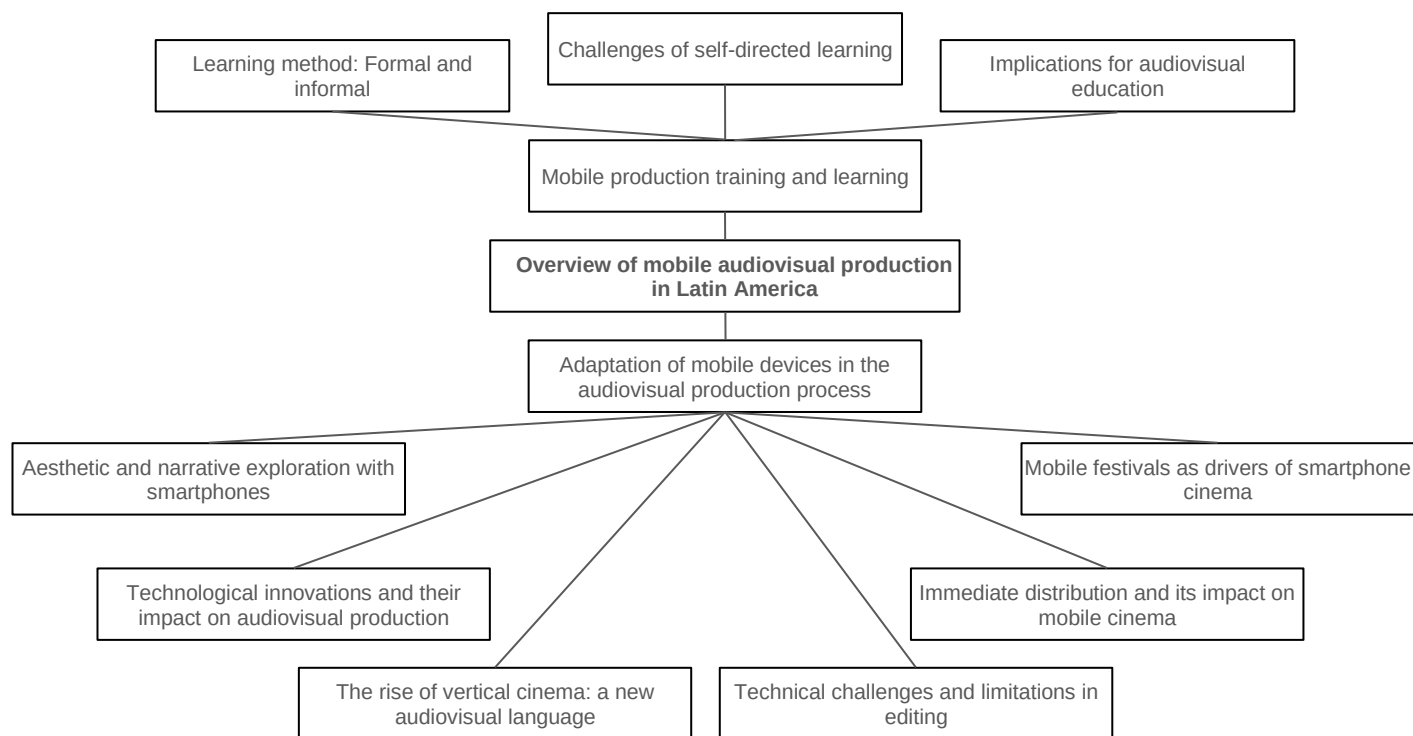
The challenge lies in the fact that many advanced skills, such as editing or handling specialized accessories, often require technical training that is not always available. This opens up an opportunity to develop new skills among audiovisual producers.

4.3.3. Audiovisual training implications

The lack of specific formal training in the use of smartphones represents a gap in today's audiovisual education. Integrating specialized modules in mobile technologies could not only respond to the growing demand for accessible tools, but also further professionalize this field: "I think universities should offer courses on how to use these tools, because they are the future of independent filmmaking" (Interview 3, Colombia, 2023).

Incorporating mobile technologies into educational programs could include hands-on workshops on mobile editing, using accessories such as stabilizers and microphones, and exploring specific narratives such as vertical cinema. This would help legitimize the use of smartphones in professional filmmaking and train filmmakers prepared to face the challenges of a constantly evolving audiovisual industry.

Figure 1. Overview of mobile audiovisual production in Latin America.



Source: Own elaboration.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The advanced capabilities of embedded cameras in smartphones have greatly expanded the creative horizons of independent filmmakers, in accordance with Fadilah (2023). This technological innovation has established itself as an accessible and versatile tool that is not only an economical alternative, but also redefines the ways of filming, in line with Williams (2022). In addition, it allows filmmakers to have a single device to record, edit, perform basic post-production and distribute content on different platforms, a phenomenon characteristic of digital media, according to Marafon and Araujo (2021).

In Latin America, this technology has sparked a growing interest among independent filmmakers, who see in smartphones an opportunity to strengthen the region's audiovisual industry. This coincides with Ledesma (2019), according to whom Latin American cinema, although it has a rich narrative tradition, has historically developed under conditions of austerity in the means of production, as West (2020) and Rodríguez (2020) also point out. For Pradilla Barrero (2020), examples such as "Oso Polar" by Marcelo Tobar (Mexico), "Sin Vagina Me Marginan" by Wesley Verástegui (Peru), and "Cinema Inferno" by Rafael Arévalo (Peru) set precedents in the construction of a cinematic tradition with smartphones in Latin America and motivate other filmmakers to explore these technologies.

However, the findings of this research highlight that the audiovisual industry and professional spaces tend to limit the use of smartphones to the experimental or amateur sphere, which hinders their integration into broader contexts. This underlines the importance of recognizing their potential to strengthen the cultural and creative industry. In this sense, mobile film festivals play a fundamental role in legitimizing and professionalizing the use of smartphones in audiovisual production. Events such as Mobile Film Latam and SmartFilms in Colombia, as well as Ojo Móvil Fest in Peru, not only provide exhibition spaces, but also act as platforms for hands-on learning and creative dissemination, as noted by Karbaum Padilla et al. (2024).

On the other hand, there is a lack of integration of smartphones in formal audiovisual training programs. Most of the filmmakers interviewed report having acquired their skills in a self-taught way, using informal resources and personal experiences. This is in line with the findings of Figueras Maz et al. (2021) and Galatsopoulou et al. (2022). In this context, mobile festivals are filling this gap by providing workshops and training spaces that complement the self-taught experience.

The practical implications of this study are manifold. On the one hand, it highlights the need to integrate specific training modules on the use of smartphones in educational programs to professionalize audiovisual production; on the other hand, it encourages the legitimization of these technologies through specialized festivals that make their technical and narrative potential visible in the creative industry. Finally, we recognize as a limitation of this study the focus on a small group of independent filmmakers, which may limit the generalization of the findings. In this sense, the results are not generalized because it is a qualitative research, as pointed out by Hernández Sampieri et al. (2010). Nevertheless, the richness of the perspectives gathered provides a solid basis for future research. We recommend further research on how educational institutions integrate the use of smartphones in audiovisual training, on how production and distribution companies perceive these technologies, and on the impact of mobile festivals on the professionalization of films made with smartphones.

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7. ANNEX

Instrument

Blocks of questions asked to the participants during the interviews:

Block 1: Experience with smartphone production.

1. How long have you been producing audiovisual content?
2. What was the first audiovisual project you produced exclusively with a smartphone and what was your experience with it?
3. How did you learn to use smartphones for audiovisual production?
4. Have you specialized in audiovisual production with smartphones through a course?
5. What was the most ambitious or complex audiovisual production you have done with a smartphone and what was your experience with it?
6. What advantages or difficulties have you found in producing audiovisual content with smartphones?

Block 2: Main concepts related to audiovisual production with smartphones.

7. What are the characteristics that make audiovisual production with smartphones unique?
8. What are the main differences between producing audiovisual content with smartphones and with conventional cameras?
9. What are the opportunities and challenges of audiovisual production with smartphones?

Block 3: Techniques and resources used in smartphone production.

10. How do you use the audiovisual language when recording with a smartphone? Is it different at all?
11. Do you use smartphones to edit your videos? Why?
12. What types of applications do you use or know about for making videos with smartphones (pre-, pro-, and post-production)?
13. What types of accessories can be used to improve the quality of mobile device production?
14. How do the technical possibilities or limitations of smartphones influence creativity in audiovisual production?
15. Do you know what new trends and/or emerging technologies are being used in audiovisual production with smartphones?

Block 4: Overview of audiovisual production with these smartphones in Latin America and by country.

16. What is the current situation of audiovisual production with smartphones in your country?
17. How is the audiovisual industry in your country adapting to the use of smartphones?
18. Who are the leading filmmakers in smartphone audiovisual production?
19. Which smartphone filmmakers do you know in your country?
20. Do you think that the new generations are the ones creating content with smartphones or are the older generations adapting?
21. Which platforms do you think have helped more filmmakers in your country to get their work known?
22. Do you know which countries in Latin America have the greatest development in audiovisual production with smartphones?

Block 5: Recommendations for smartphone audiovisual production.

23. How do you manage the storage and organization of files produced with smartphones?
24. What do you think about vertical video and have you thought about recording material in this format?
25. What distribution channels do you use to distribute your smartphone work?
26. What are the main recommendations to achieve a quality audiovisual production with smartphones?

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