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Encouraging entrepreneurial journalism among university students

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Abstract

Introduction. This article presents the results of the implementation of the teaching methodology designed for the course titled Creation and Management of News Media Companies. **Method.** The study is based on the direct observation of the students enrolled in the course and their practical course work, as well as an online survey, composed of seven closed questions about the perception of the course. **Results.** Most students who completed the course evaluated it positively and would consider the possibility of becoming self-employed journalists and creating a news media company, although they also admit that they do not have enough knowledge in business and economy. **Conclusions.** In addition to confirming the importance of including this course in the Journalism study programme, particularly in the current economic crisis, the article offers some proposals to improve the course and encourage entrepreneurship among students of Journalism.

Keywords

Journalism; entrepreneurship; enterprises; teaching innovation.

Contents

1. Introduction 1.1. Creating a news media company and surviving the process. 1.2. The Creation and management of news media companies course in the EHEA. 1.3. The Creation and management of news media companies course in the education programme. 1.4. Research objectives, hypotheses and justification. 2. Methods. 3. Results. 3.1. About the course. 3.2. About the individual assignment. 3.3. About the journalistic enterprise team project. 4. Conclusions. 5. List of references.

Translation by **CA Martínez Arcos**, PhD. (Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas).

1. Introduction

As Sánchez Tabernero (2008: 25) has already explained in the “2008 Annual Report of the Journalistic Profession” in Spain (*Informe Anual de la Profesión Periodística 2008*), “the media companies have always lived between euphoria and distress”, alternating times of excellent economic results with periods of recession, which are usually followed by moments of hope.

Since its outbreak in 2008, the economic crisis has strongly hit the media. In the “2011 Annual Report of the Journalistic Profession” (*Informe Anual de la Profesión Periodística 2011*), Farias (2011:15) describes how in recent years journalism went from being a profession characterised by professional intrusion to a profession characterised by job insecurity, then by unemployment, and later by the current situation, in which job insecurity and independence issues are the major concerns of journalists. As a result, the credibility of the information and the professional activity of journalism have been deteriorated in the last five years. In addition, journalism is affected by the crisis of its business-model and the changes in citizens’ information consumption habits.

From 2008 to 2013, the number of registered unemployed journalists increased by 132%. When the crisis began, there were 4,556 journalists registered on Spain’s National Public Employment Service, and by the end of last year the number was 10,560, as documented in the “2013 Annual Report of the Journalistic Profession” (*Informe Anual de la Profesión Periodística 2013*) (Palacios, 2013: 28).

However, we agree with Farias (2011: 15) when he affirms that the current crisis affecting the media and the profession of journalism “did not only begin with the recession five years ago, but that it acted as an accelerator of something that had been long brewing: the degradation of the information system”, which has been probably excessively conditioned by the political and commercial interests, which provoke the dependence of information on the interests of the funding sources (both public and private), especially during a time when the fall in advertising revenue has affected the media’s financial results.

However, even in this context, journalism has not disappeared, but seems to be getting stronger. In fact, citizens are demanding more plural and independent information than ever before. Data proves this: although it is true that the audience of the traditional media has decreased, the number of citizens that get informed and the time dedicated to the consumption of news has grown and this is, in part, thanks to the new media that have emerged in recent years, such as the digital media, blogs and social networks, and particularly to the efforts of journalists.

Faced with this situation, and although so far no one seems to have the solution, it becomes more necessary to reconsider the career opportunities of journalists, who should perhaps consider working

in small media companies and even in “micro-specialised media” (instead of continue hoping to work for the mainstream media, which mostly belong to large corporations) or should consider undertaking projects and initiatives, which ensure more independence and the ability to offer the balanced information that citizens are demanding to guarantee a proper democratic system.

And in this context, universities should play a relevant role, for example by promoting the study of basic business concepts that will help future journalists to learn about the management of news media companies, by encouraging students to create and launch business projects, in line within the current Spanish legal and economic framework, to guarantee plural and independent information and encourage the incorporation of graduates to the labour market. This can be achieved through the inclusion of courses (classes) such as Creation and Management of News Media Companies, which can be designed to promote an entrepreneurial spirit among students.

Thus, the main objective of this article is to assess the results achieved during the academic year 2013-2014 by the teaching of Creation and Management of News Media Companies, which is a course offered as part of the Bachelor’s degree in Journalism of the School of Communication Sciences of the University of Malaga. In addition, the article offers some proposals to improve the next academic courses.

1.1. Creating a news media company and surviving the process

Casero Ripollés (2013) describes and defines the profile of the entrepreneur based on the ideas of Audet and Couderet (2012), Obschonda *et al.* (2010), Rauch and Frese (2007), Pfeilstetter (2011), Austin, Stevenson *et al.* (2006), Defourny and Nyssens (2010), and proposes the incorporation of entrepreneurship as a teaching and educational competency in the field of News Media Businesses with the support of “teaching strategies and methods to encourage and motivate students towards self-employment” (2013: 686).

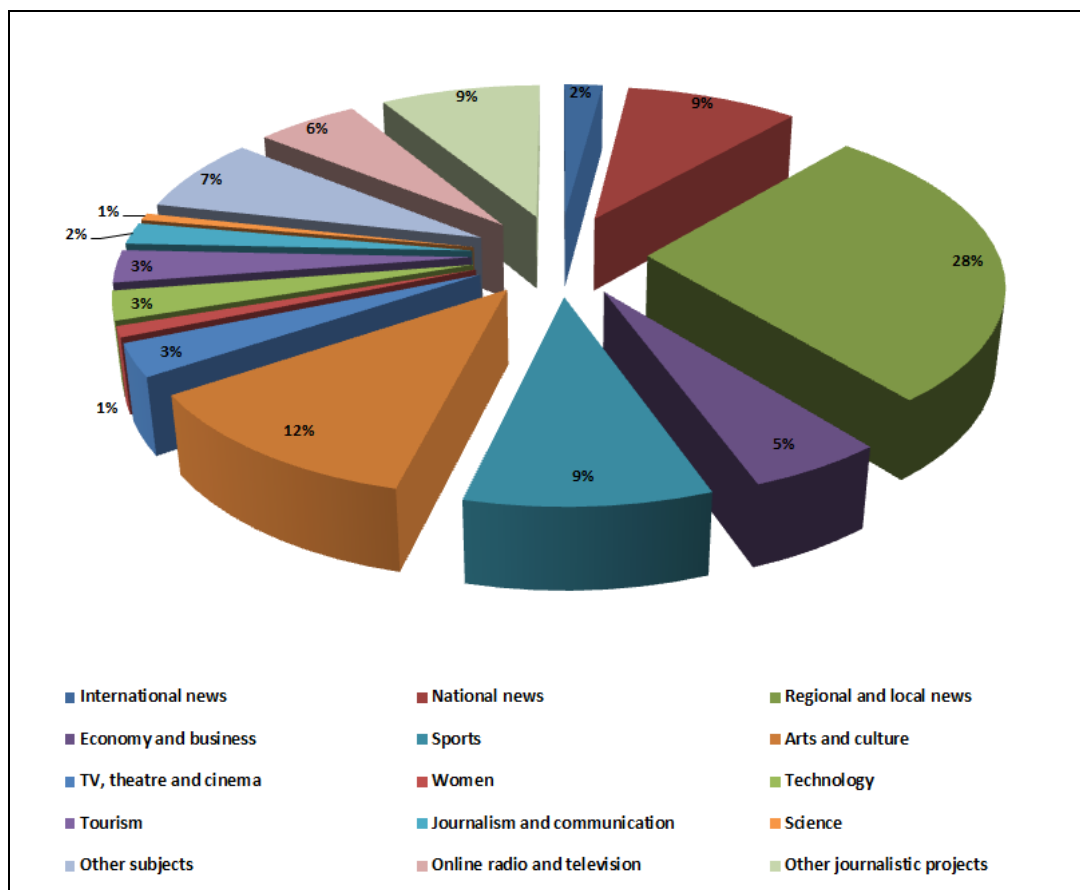
Yuste and Cabrera (2014: 65-73) describe what they consider to be today’s new journalist profiles: the information architect, the community manager, the copy editor, the digitiser, the web designer, the web editor, the digital marketing specialist, the accessibility expert, the metadata expert, the SEM and SEO experts, the usability expert, the content manager, the multimedia writer, the multimedia editor, the video director, the contents manager and the digital reputation manager.

However, the great unresolved issue about the new media is their funding model. A priori, starting up a digital media company is possible from the economic point of view, but its profitability, given that the traditional model seems to have an expiration date, is not guaranteed, despite the different funding options which, as Yuste and Cabrera (2014: 87-132) point out, include the sale of contents via the Internet, advertising, sponsorship, crowdfunding, micropayments, subscriptions, coupons and discounts, apps and tablets, versioning, content syndication, content selection services and custom-generated content.

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, journalism is more alive than ever, and even in this economic context, which does not seem very promising, numerous journalistic projects and initiatives do offer hope, as evidenced by different surveys that confirm the emergence of news media companies from 2008 to 2013, in the midst of the economic crisis and the crisis of the media business model.

The “2013 Annual Report of the Journalistic Profession” (*Informe de la Profesión Periodística*, 2013) confirms the creation of up to 288 media companies from 2008 to 2013. Most of these media companies operate in digital and printed platforms, and operate as limited-liability companies, are autonomous or part of associations, and are mostly funded by advertising, sponsorship, micro-patronage and copy sales.

Figure 1. Profile of news companies launched between 2008 and 2013



Source: Author’s own creation based on data from *Informe de la Profesión Periodística 2013*.

In this case, the most common themes of the news-media ventures are regional or local news (80), arts, culture, cinema and theatre (43), national news (27), economy and business (15), online radio and television (16) and others (54).

1.2. The Creation and management of news media companies course in the EHEA

1.2.1. Journalism studies in the EHEA

The development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) facilitates the recognition and approval of qualifications, ensuring the better education of students and their integration into the

European labour market. The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) constitutes a remarkable change in teaching methods as it puts greater emphasis on students' learning and self-learning than on teaching.

With this new model, classes are reduced and more attention is paid to the work carried out by students, who acquire a considerable role in their own grading. The work of the teacher, therefore, focuses on guiding and direct students, and thus seminars and tutorials become more important. These changes aim to better prepare students to deal with the current, highly dynamic and competitive, economic environment.

New BA degrees in Journalism integrate the education requirements which, according to the white paper on communication degrees, published by the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA), should guide these types of degrees: analytical and critical capacity, good technical and professional education, lab-based experimentation, capacity to reflect on the journalistic work, creativity, predisposition to innovation, and ease to adapt to changes and future technological environments (Farias, 2009: 126).

Moreover, the white paper includes the disciplines on which journalism studies must be based. The new communication degrees respond to the demands of the current globalised society, in which all the aspects related to communication have experienced huge developments in the last decades. In addition, according to all indicators, these developments will continue and even increase in the coming years; and in this sense, journalism graduates must try, therefore, to meet the social demands, according to the needs of the labour market.

In recent years, as Sábes and Verón (2012: 159) point out, journalism studies have experienced an important growth, both in terms of the number of new journalism schools (both public and private) and the number of students seeking these degrees. The evolution of journalism studies has been marked by a steady increase in the number of enrolled students. In fact, at the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century the number of students enrolled in journalism degrees was 15,980 (academic year 2000-2001), while at the end of this decade the number was 19,068 (academic year 2010-2011) (Farias, 2011: 78)

The important growth in journalism students can be explained, in part, by the seduction that this type of studies generates among young people. The seduction power of journalism has been fed by the "increasing mythification" of the media professionals, probably due to the influence of cinema and some TV series, which produce a 'pull effect' (Farias, 2008: 68). In this sense, a striking fact is that, according to the "2011 Annual Report on the Journalistic Profession" (*Informe Anual de la Profesión Periodística 2011*), 66.6% of the survey participants recognised that they would like their children to be journalists.

In terms of the number of journalism graduates, since the Schools of journalism opened in Spain back in the 1970s, more than 75,300 students have graduated in journalism, and each nearly 3,000 new journalists enter the job market (in 2011 there were 3,054 journalism graduates). However, a large number of young professionals cannot be employed by the traditional media and this is used by some experts to confirm the current job insecurity.

"(...) the incorporation of these young people to the traditional media market is more than complicated by the global economic crisis, which (...) is exacerbated by the deep crisis of the

traditional media and the lack of a new business model for the media operating on the new platforms. It is, thus, a time of global change in the communication sector, from production to distribution and consumption. Therefore, these variations also directly affect the education of these young people who want to be journalists and have witnessed how in a few years the communications market has transformed” (Sabés and Verón, 2012: 159)

1.3. The Creation and management of news media companies course in the education programme

The adaptation to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has involved a profound renewal of the Spanish University system, as it prioritises practice over theory, adopts reduced groups to the detriment of the macro classes and relies on new technologies. The new methodological approach of the EHEA aims to transform “our teaching-based educational system to one based on learning” (MEC, 2005).

The new educational methods emphasise independent learning and collaborative learning among classmates, giving a protagonist role to students. “This change needs to be based on three principles: greater student involvement and autonomy; use of more active methods, including team work; and making teachers to focus on managing stimulating learning environments” (MEC, 2005; Arquero, 2005: 8).

In this new context the roles of students and teachers have been redefined and students have been given a much more active role in their own learning process.

“In 1986, Shuell summarised the five most important features that learning must have in a student-oriented teaching system: active learning, self-regulated learning, constructive learning, situated learning, and social learning. (...) To these five features we should add the importance of generating in university students the necessary skills to ensure their lifelong learning” (Peinado, Fernández *et al.*, 2013: 121-122).

In order to face the rapid changes in our society, the university as an educational institution should offer students the tools and capabilities needed to become lifelong learners. In this sense, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (2005) have established that the key competences for lifelong learning are all those that people need to achieve personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment.

These competences for lifelong learning should combine knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. According to the recommendations of the European Union, the educational system must provide citizens with a number of basic skills: Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, interpersonal, intercultural and social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression (Santamaría, 2010: 54).

Of these competences, and due to the very nature of our subject, we are going to highlight the development of the sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, which is understood as a person’s ability to transform ideas into acts, as a competence associated with creativity, innovation and risk-taking,

and as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. In addition, this competence is considered the foundation of other more specific skills and understandings that are required by entrepreneurs when undertaking a new social or commercial activity (Peinado, Fernández *et al.*, 2013: 126).

Along this line, the BA degree in Journalism of the University of Malaga (UMA) includes among its specific competences: knowledge of the media structure, business operation and management, with special attention to the media, advertising and PR companies; and knowledge of the different professional profiles and career opportunities of journalists.

With regards to “Creation and Management of News Media Companies”, it is a course that is worth 6 ECTS credits and is part of the optional module offered during the fourth year of study, and whose competences include: capacity and ability to create news companies, and skills for the management and organisation of any type of business.

The importance of this course (class) in the curriculum of the journalism degree is that

“the knowledge of the business dimension of the media enables students to integrate themselves professionally and more effectively to these organisations, provides techniques that facilitate students’ ability to assume managerial functions in the future and, given the major transformations that social communication is currently experiencing, provides students with alternatives - such as self-employment and other professional opportunities – which allow students to take advantage of new job opportunities” (Peinado and Fernández Sande, 2011).

The economic crisis of the news companies makes it harder for recent journalism graduates to access decent jobs in the traditional media. Therefore, a professional employment alternative is self-employment. “Is not a simple task for newly graduates to face new projects, but it [self-employment] is one of the major opportunities that are currently being detected” (Sabés and Verón, 2012: 165).

Campos (2010) highlights that the current economic crisis has produced profound changes in the structure and organisation of the media, in the professional profiles demanded by the media, in the audience’s consumption habits, in the media’s business model, and even in media’s approach to traditional values. However, the crisis has also provoked a strong reorganisation in the media sector and the emergence of innovative ideas, which open new expectations and job opportunities in the journalistic profession. All these changes must be the object of study in the “Creation and Management of News Media Companies” course, which must identify the changes, and study the consequences, trends, and professional and business alternatives.

1.4. Research objectives, hypotheses and justification

The objectives of this study are to analyse the methods and results of the optional course titled “Creation and Management of News Media Companies”, which is offered in the fourth year of the B.A. degree in Journalism.

The article aims to analyse the effects achieved among students, from the academic and professional points of view, as well as the interest shown by students towards the course’s focus and contents. It is

also relevant to assess the fulfilment of the fundamental objective of the course: to promote the entrepreneurial and business spirit among future graduates.

This research study is based on the hypothesis that journalism students do not consider creating their own journalistic enterprise probably because they chose a degree in Journalism influenced by the mythification of the journalistic profession and other already mentioned reasons, and that they aspire to be employed by the big mass media companies. However, our second hypothesis is that if students are encouraged during their studies, through a specific course/class that provides them with contents related to business and entrepreneurship, many of them can change their initial opinion and consider self-employment and the creation of a journalistic enterprise as a career opportunity.

The third hypothesis is that in order to achieve this change in students it is necessary to provide them with greater education in economics and business applied to the journalistic profession, as demanded by the students themselves.

2. Methods

The method applied in this study is the case study. In particular, we examine the results of the course titled “Creation and Management of News Media Companies”, which is part of the B.A. degree in Journalism offered by the University of Malaga.

In the 2013-2014 academic year, 58 of the 60 places available for “Creation and Management of News Media Companies” were taken (by 30 male students and 28 female students). Three of the students enrolled in the course were part of the Seneca and Erasmus Mundi programmes (two and one, respectively).

The method proposed for the teaching of this course was as follows. Students had to complete an individual assignment (worth 30% of the final grade), which consisted in producing a written or audiovisual news story or interview about a recently-launched news media company, preferably launched during the economic crisis (2008-2013), based on research on the Internet and/or in-depth interviews. The content of the work had to be related to the contents covered in the course’s syllabus: business funding, conception of business ideas, business organisation, distribution and structure, analysis of the competition, etc.

In addition, we formed groups of up to five students for the development of an original journalistic enterprise project, which had to be viable in today’s society, had to describe its legal form, had to include an analysis of the environment and the competition, marketing, dissemination and funding strategies, budgets, a feasibility plan, etc.

The remaining 10% of the evaluation was divided between participation in class and in the discussion forums of the online campus, and voluntary participation in a role-playing game, which consisted in investing an amount of money in the stock market so that students become familiar with this type of operation.

The results of the implementation of this new teaching method were assessed by means of direct observation of students’ daily work in class and tutoring sessions, as well as the analysis of the

academic results achieved by students. In addition, an online survey was applied to students to investigate their perceptions of the course.

This survey included seven closed-ended questions, which could only be answered with “Yes” or “No”. These questions aimed to measure students’ interest in the course and the fulfilment of the course’s objectives and to know whether students would recommend the course to students from junior years. Thus, students were asked whether they considered the possibility of starting a news media company before taking the course and whether they would consider this possibility after having taken the course and in light of the knowledge acquired. The questionnaire also included two 1-10 scale questions (10 being the highest score) and investigated different concepts related with the course and the main difficulties encountered in its development.

Finally, students were asked about the motives and preferences when it comes to choose the theme of the business plan, in order to assess their degree of interest, their relationship with the local environment and their professional preferences.

The survey was conducted among those students who showed an active participation through the course. Thus, 54.16% (or 26) of all enrolled students answered the questionnaire.

Subsequently, we organised a discussion group with 10 students enrolled in the course (six females and four males) to delve into some of the issues raised in the survey. The discussion lasted two hours and was coordinated by a professor who introduced several questions, which each participant answered freely. The discussion was very enriching and served to detect criticisms about the development of the course and the coordination between disciplines, whose contribution can improve the entrepreneurial projects.

3. Results

3.1. About the course

“Creation and Management of News Media Companies” is an optional course that is worth 6 ECTS practical-theoretical credits and is offered in the fourth year of the BA degree in Journalism. This course explores basic business concepts that any news media manager must know. This course is designed for those students interested in news media management, from managers of any level and area (marketing, human resources, production, writing, etc.). In this sense, the course adopts a practical and didactic approach and each of the topics includes case studies and exercises that help students understand the theoretical contents.

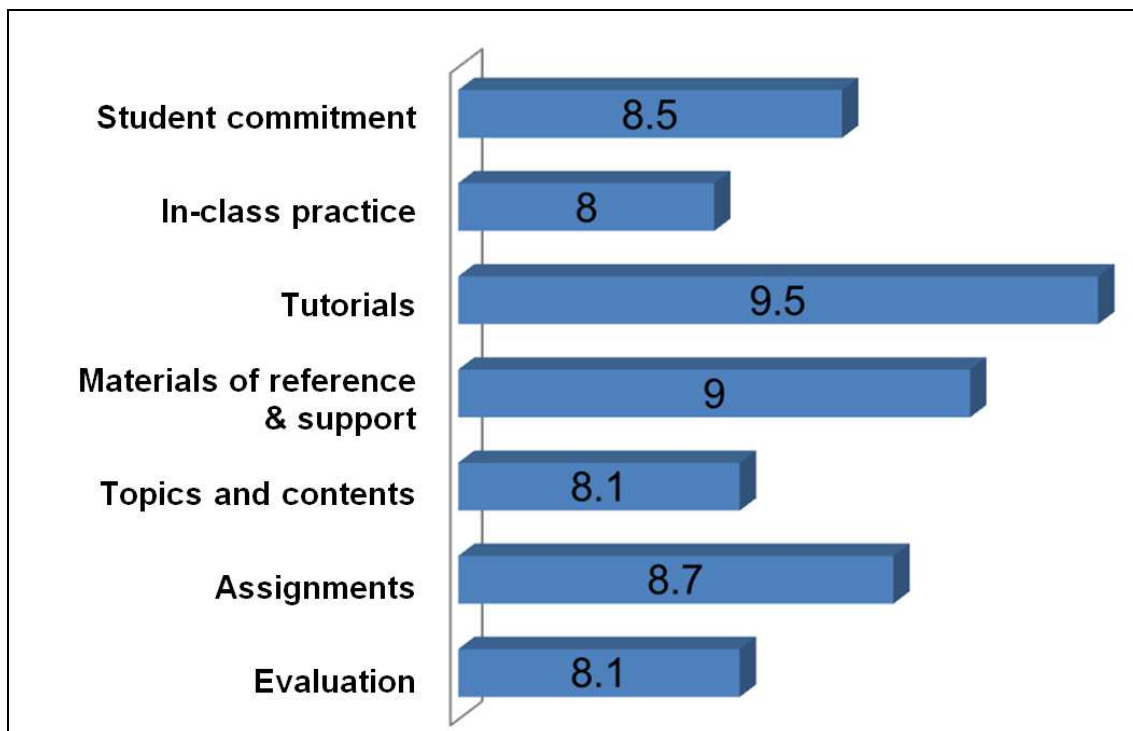
The objective of the course is to make students capable of designing projects to start a news media company, within the existing Spanish legal and economic framework, so that the project can be actually implemented in today’s society. To do so, the teaching of the course includes a series of conferences and lectures conducted by Spanish experts in the creation of news companies, such as the Young Entrepreneurs Association (*Asociación de Jóvenes Empresarios*), the Chamber of Commerce, the Business Confederation and public institutions like the Municipal Institute for the Promotion of Employment (IMFE) and Promálaga, in order to bring the business environment closer to students.

Likewise, teaching is based on the real experiences of previous editions of this course, and even searches for synergies with similar courses offered in other degrees of the University of Malaga, in order to integrate journalism students in the business projects of other study programmes and disciplines, to promote and encourage the incorporation of students to the labour market. In this sense, the course proposes that students should acquire the following specific skills: capacity and ability to create news companies and to manage organise any type of business.

As noted in the methods section, students should complete two main assignments: 1) to individually develop a news story or interview on a newly created company; and 2) to develop a journalistic enterprise project proposal. This last assignment requires students to present a viable project and to address the main aspects of a business project (its legal form, the analysis of the environment and the competition, marketing, broadcasting, and funding strategies, budgets, feasibility plan, etc.)

Regarding the evaluation of the course, most students valued their experience with the course very positively. In fact, 100% of the respondents considered both the course and its contents to be very interesting, and 95.6% would recommend it to other students.

Figure 2. General assessment of the course (1-10 scale)



Source: Authors' own creation based on the results of the online survey applied to students through the virtual campus.

In this sense, the focus group participants highlighted the connection of the course with the reality of the journalistic profession. In addition, several participants stated that after having completed this course they have considered the idea of creating their own journalistic enterprise, although some confessed that they had already thought about it before taking the course. Other participants also

emphasised that, while the duration of the course (four months) was a very short for this type of content, they got a global vision of the business world, centred in the field of communication. Students have also pointed out that in this course they have had the possibility of putting into practice the knowledge and skills acquired in other classes, thus highlighting the transverse relations between courses.

Student 9. “More than theory, in this course we’ve seen what’s out there, and we have liked the practical nature of the course”

Student 3. “Thanks to this course, some of us have thought of the possibility of becoming our own employers. You can create a company and stop looking for a job. And we can work on what we like and make a living out of it”

Student 1. “I think the best of this course is that at the end you get a full understanding of the news business, from its creation to designing its dissemination plan, identifying its publics, and examining its feasibility. In other words, we have seen the reality that’s out there”

Student 4. “[the course] has given us a more transversal vision and understanding of the concepts examined in other classes”

With regards to the assessment of the students (Figure 2), students highlighted the importance of teachers’ tutorials and the materials of reference and support (web pages, videos and audio files, etc.), which were provided through the virtual campus. These aspects received scores of 9.5 and 9, respectively. These scores were similar to the ones given by most of the focus groups participants, who also highlighted the good quality of the tutorials and the utility of the provided materials, although some recognised not being able to take full advantage of the course.

Student 3. “Group tutorials worked well because they allowed us to analyse the errors and approach of the assignments”

In terms of the evaluation of the assignments proposed by the teachers, they received an average score of 8.7 out of 10. As we confirmed in the focus group, students had a positive experience, both with the individual assignment and the journalistic venture project proposal. Even so, in this global assessment, students also shared self-criticism, especially in such aspects as the choice of the theme of the journalistic venture project, since several groups were guided more by their personal preferences than by the career opportunities and the needs of the market.

Student 6. “I saw the individual assignment very useful, because it is very useful to access new media, because it gives us new points of view, information on how to shape our company...”

Students 3 and 4. “We choose the project on culture, because it was a field that we liked, and because we thought that it was a strong sector in Malaga and had a greater niche market. Another thing is the actual demand on the streets. Although needs should also be created.”

Students. “Our choice was based on preferences and interest in dominating the theme”

Student 1. “The topic of our project was chosen because we wanted to do something truly real and because we believe that our project does not exist in Malaga.”

Student 8. “I did it because there is nothing on the market [like it] and because the only case I know does work but also has deficiencies.”

Student 5. “I had the idea for some time. And we believe that there is nothing [like it] on the market, so it can have a niche market. And, it is possible that we will implement the idea later”.

Focus groups participants also proposed some changes in the assignments, which in their opinion would improve the course. Thus, for example, they suggested bringing forward the deadline to hand in the individual assignment and to analyse the results of this assignment in class, in order to enrich the subsequent team project assignment. Similarly, one self-critical student recommended that teachers should stimulate and reward creativity in the formats used to present the assignments.

Student 5. “I would bring forward the delivery date of the individual assignment because it could give you many ideas for the business project.”

Student 1. “I think it would be a good idea to analyse in the class examples of the projects that have emerged in recent years.”

Student 5. “[we should] dedicate a class to highlight the conclusions drawn from the interviews and the news stories about the companies that emerged during the crisis.”

Student 5. “Doing the final work in phases seems a good idea, but I would take more advantage of the practical classes about the analysis of the competition, budgeting...”

On the other hand, students evaluate their level of commitment with the course with a score of 8.5. Regarding the evaluation system, students generally agreed with teachers’ approach, but some students considered that, in terms of the team project assignment (a journalistic enterprise project proposal), the weight or the importance given to students’ assessment of the proposal to decide its final grade is excessive, considering that some students may base their assessment of the work more on their relationship with authors (the friendship factor) than on the quality of the proposed project.

Student 3. “I like the evaluation method. I like being assessed by both teachers and classmates. We are young and our way of thinking is the same and age-based affinity always provides ideas and the evaluation is interesting in this sense. It helps us to manage the project.”

Student 1. “I approve of it, as long as students don’t let themselves to be influenced by friendships when evaluating their classmates.”

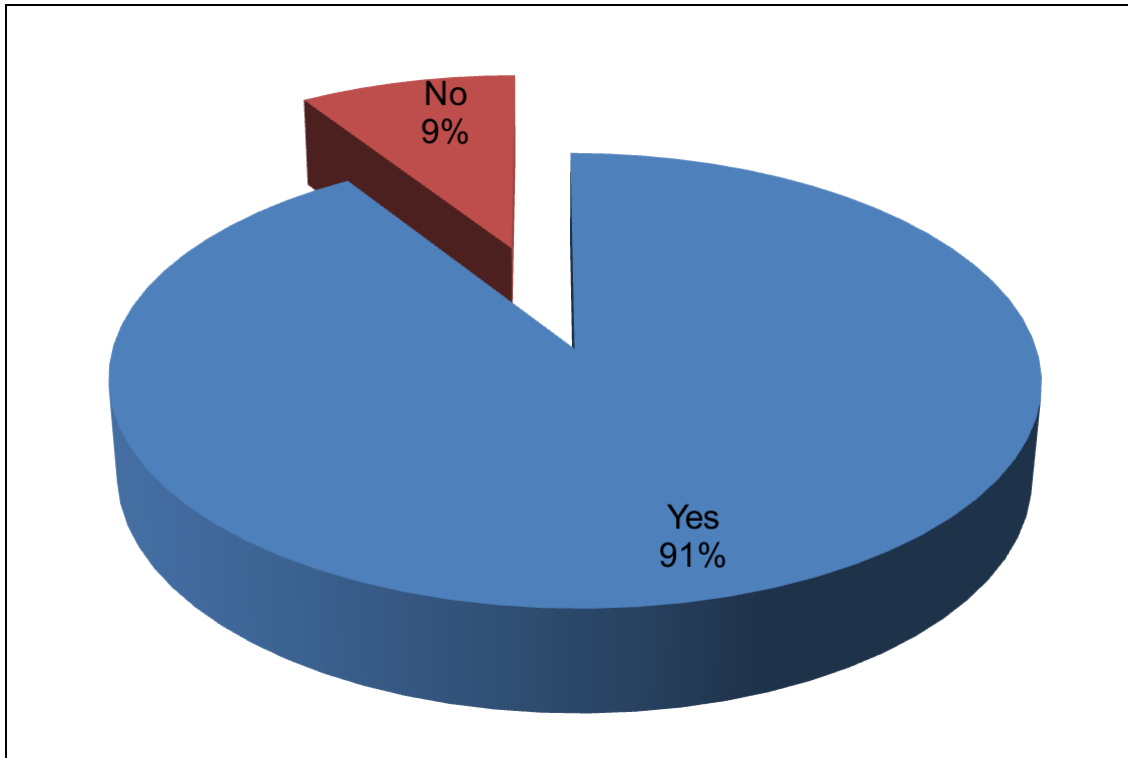
Student 3. “We must be responsible in the evaluation and don’t let ourselves get carried away.”

Student 8. “Having several projects on the same topic helps you, because there is more competition and you see the errors and strive to set your project apart...”

Student 2. “The situation of job insecurity affects us a lot and that is why we are more critical and we are more aware when assessing the projects.”

At the end of the course, most students recognised that it was helpful, to such an extent that, before taking the course only 39% had ever consider the possibility of launching a journalistic enterprise and the rest (61%) never thought about it; while now, after completing the course, 91% of them does consider this option as a career opportunity. This is a fact to keep in mind, especially during the current crisis, in which the options of specialised “micro-journalism” are greater than the options job opportunities offered by multimedia groups.

Figure 3. Having completed the course, would you consider launching a journalistic enterprise?



Source: Authors' own creation based on the results of the online survey applied to students through the virtual campus.

Student 3. "It didn't occur to me because before I wanted to work in an existing media company, and to gain experience before considering this option. However, during the course... with the assignments and the talks, I became slightly interested. Then we thought about finding a niche market that was not too unexploited, and why not? This can open up other possibilities at a time of uncertainty."

Student 4. "Up until the fourth year we did not have much knowledge on how to start a company, or knew that this was also an option for journalists. When you start your degree you don't think about starting a project from scratch."

Student 3. "The contents were initially unrelated to our study programme, but once you get to know the other side of the profession, you begin to consider it for you."

Student 5. "Whether in a real or artificial way, at some point we all have thought about starting our own journalistic enterprise. Once you complete the course you have much more knowledge, but in the end what matters is the economic viability. This is basic in any company."

Student 1. "Yes, we had considered it before. Because we liked the idea of creating a more social medium that addressed the issues ignored by the institutional agenda, such as the environment and social issues. A media company more focused on a reduced population or

segmented by micro-themes, by the city districts... The course helped us to better understand this possibility.”

Student 2. “Yes, we had thought about it, prompted by the circumstances of uncertainty in the profession, since it is difficult to even get internships. We had thought about creating a medium of this type, and after having completed the “Creation and Management of News Media Companies” course we are more motivated than before.”

Student 6. “Learning about the public aids, grants and incentives and the new forms of funding... and all that stuff is good for us, and gives us another point of view. We did not know they existed. No one had put us in contact with this reality.”

Student 5. “The economy is a conditioning factor when thinking about creating a company. If you don’t have support, it is likely the project will not materialise. Obviously, the first thing is the idea, an idea that works and can be profitable in a reasonable time.”

Student 7. “Without economic viability, the project becomes a hobby instead of a company”

Student 2. “I think that the first thing is the theme... to find a theme that works, and then to search for profitability.”

The previous information confirms the first two hypotheses of the study: that before taking the course journalism students did not consider self-employment as a career option, probably because they chose this degree influenced by the mythification of the journalistic profession; and that if students were encouraged during their studies, through a specific course focused on providing business and entrepreneurship-related content, many students could change their mind and consider starting a news media company as career option.

With regards to the performance of students in the four-months-long course, in general terms it can be considered satisfactory, taking into account the final grades. Of the 52 students that took the course in the round, 51% obtained a remarkable grade; 19% an outstanding grade (three of them graduated with honours); 12% a passing grade; and 10% dropped from the course (most of them for not delivering or not delivering on time their individual assignments).

3.2. About the individual assignment

One of the assignments given to students for their evaluation was the production of a written or audiovisual news report or interview about a journalistic enterprise that was launched during the economic crisis (2008-2013) and was still in business during the course. This section, titled “How to create a company and survive in the process”, had as its main objective to motivate students and to awaken their interest in the course and its contents, since this assignment could help them understand how new journalistic enterprises keep on emerging despite the complex economic situation.

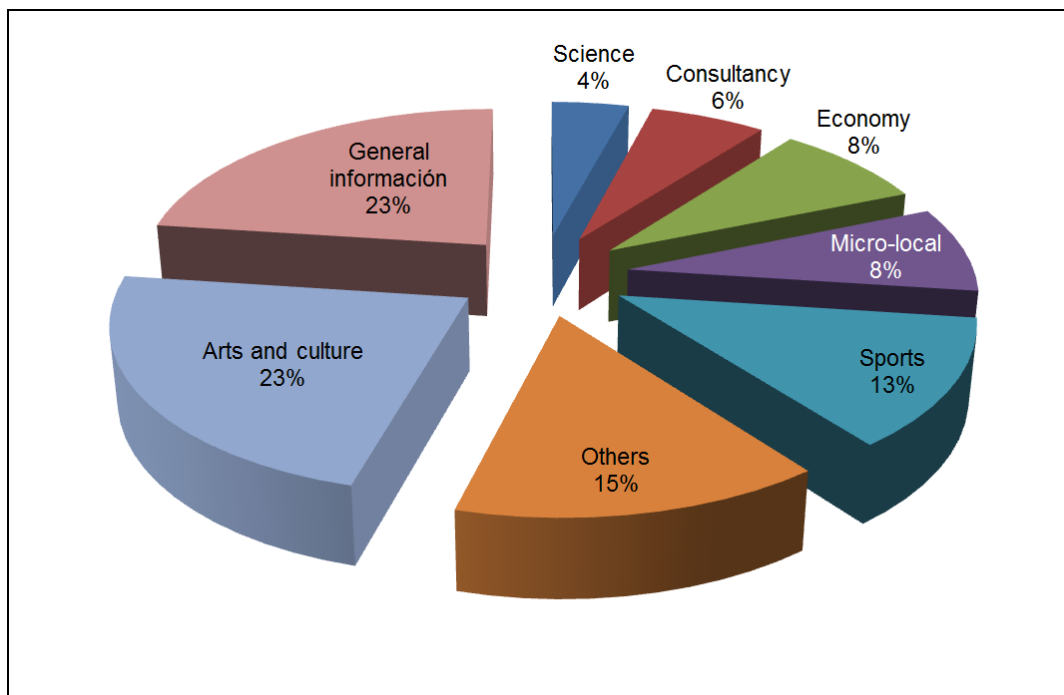
The objectives of this activity were: first, analysing different elements and contents included in the course, such as the legal form of the companies created, the analysis of the context, their strengths and weaknesses, their forms of funding, successes and failures, etc.; and second, to make students become familiar and involved with the documentation required to launch a business project.

Thus, initially the faculty listed, in the online campus 28 examples of news companies created from 2008 to 2013 in Spain, and then the students completed this list, thus increasing the choices to 39 companies. This list was later completed with the lists published in the “2013 Annual Report of the

Journalistic Profession” (*Informe Anual de la Profesión Periodística 2013*) and Juan Luis Manfredi’s blog (*Periodismo emprendedor*).

The average score obtained by the class in this assignment was 6.88 out 10, and in this regard it is important to note that in general terms the content of the works are decent, but only 59% of the students opted for a more elaborated and advance presentation in printed and audiovisual formats, and this influenced the final average grade.

Figure 4. Individual assignment. Preferred themes.



Source: Authors’ own creation based on the results of the online survey applied to students through the virtual campus.

Thus, most enrolled students opted to perform this assignment about newly created media companies dedicated to provide general information (23%), and news companies specialised in arts and culture (23%). On the other hand, 13% of the students did the assignment on sports media and 8% (economic) on micro-local media. Very few students worked on scientific news and communication consulting media companies: 4% and 6%, respectively.

With regards to the presentation format, 26% presented the assignment in audiovisual format (16% in a video shot and edited by themselves) and 10% a “radio show” format, with music and spoken descriptions, also of their own creation. Meanwhile, 33% chose to present their work in a newspaper format on a page edited with *QuarkXPress*, and the rest in an unedited Microsoft Word document.

Regarding the difficulties encountered in the assignment, several students pointed out that they had no luck when trying to obtain information from the people working in the media companies that were launched during the crisis and that most of these people were unwilling to collaborate with them.

Students. “We had difficulties to contact the new media companies... we are assuming that it was due to bad timing”

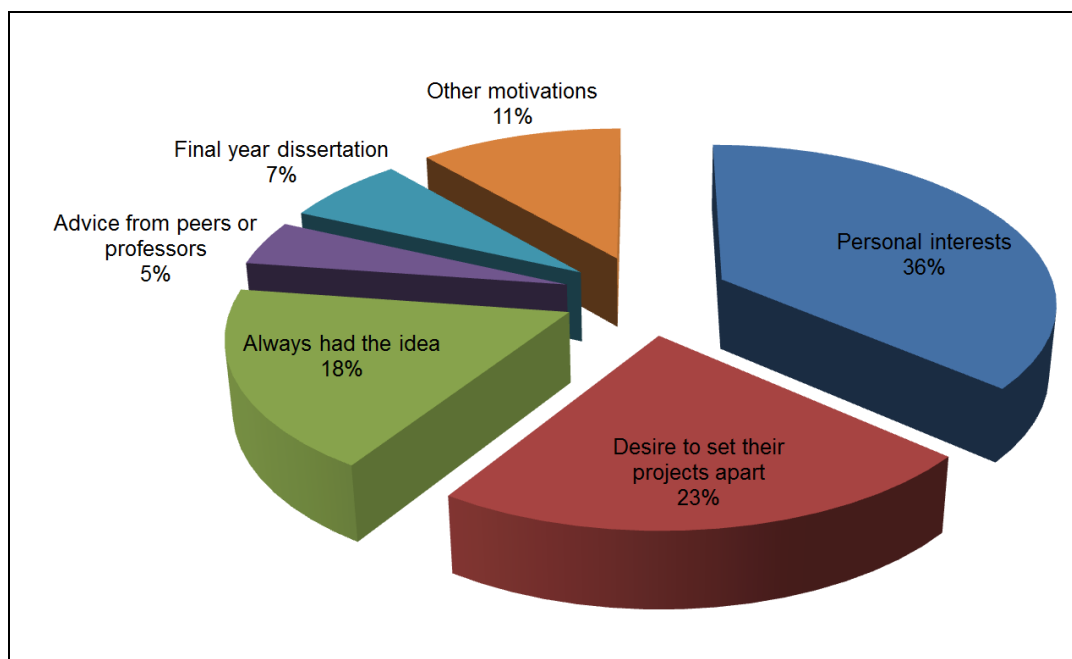
Student 5. “In my case, I had problems and lack of cooperation. They even told me that not even auditors asked so many questions...”

3.3. About the journalistic enterprise team project

As mentioned, the team assignment consisted in drafting a journalistic enterprise project proposal that was feasible in the current Spanish economic and legal framework. For this assignment we created 16 working groups of 4 to 5 students each. In this assignment, students had to propose the mission and vision of the company, its legal form; to provide an analysis of the context, coverage and competence of the company, its dissemination and marketing plan; to define its news sections, content and services; and to develop a budget and a financial viability plan.

The best entrepreneurial projects proposed by students include: several online magazines focused on cultural and entertainment contents (*Culmumanía*, *Cultura Próxima*, *Cultura Somos*, *Changuay*, *Recorre Málaga*), on general and local information (*Faro XIX*, *Zoombuzz* and *Crónica M*) and on sports (*11 amigos*); a university newspaper for Erasmus student (*Not so far away*); an online magazine focused on human journalism and people’s stories (*Yast Amazing Stories*); a local online radio station (*Radio 29*); a fashion magazine (*Pasarela España*); an educational magazine for teens (*Entérate*); and a communications consultancy company (*Socialwords*).

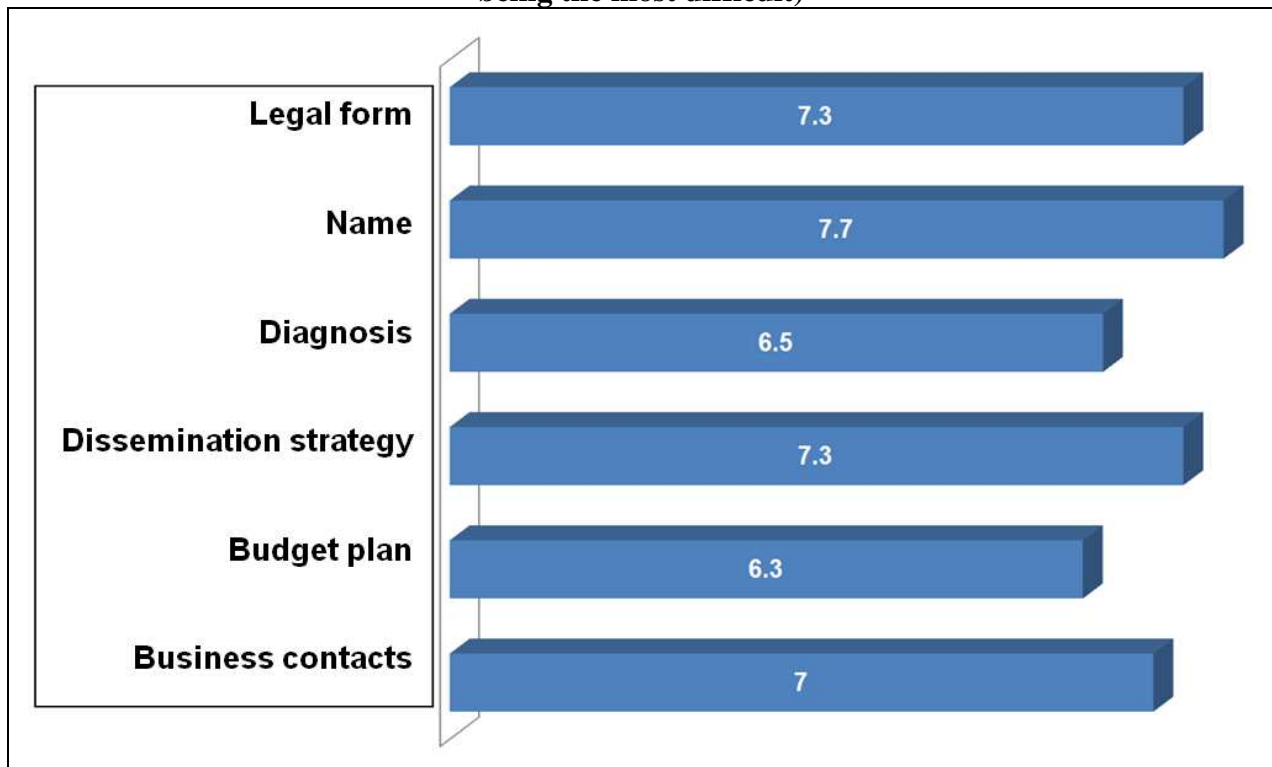
Figure 5. Motivation of the selection of the theme of the journalistic enterprise



Source: Authors’ own creation based on the results of the online survey applied to students through the virtual campus.

The choice of the theme of the journalistic enterprise proposed by students was guided by different motives: 100% of the groups were motivated by personal interests; 62.5% was motivated by the desire to set themselves apart from other projects and companies; while 50% mentioned that they had always had the idea of creating a similar company.

Figure 6. Most difficult sections to complete in the project (on a 1-10 scale, 10 being the most difficult)



Source: Authors' own creation based on the results of the online survey applied to students through the virtual campus.

The sections of the project proposal that students found the most difficult to complete were the budgeting and viability plan as well as the analysis of the context and the competition. These findings confirm our third hypothesis: there is a need to improve the economy and business knowledge among journalism students, which makes us reflect and consider the content of the course.

Students. "The biggest difficulty was to plan the budget. We have a significant deficiency in economy and it is not easy to balance revenue and expenditure. It is also difficult to estimate the feedback that we would have."

Students. "The analysis of the competition and the context was complicated. We need to learn more about tools and sources of information to document us."

Student 1. "It is not always easy to find tools to assess the competition."

With regards to the section about the company's budget and planning, we agree with Goyanes Martínez, Peinado and Miguel (2014), who have carried out a thorough review of the scientific literature on the different business models of the digital press, and propose its study from three

different areas: a better understanding of the concept of business model and a consensual classification in the digital press; the use of more sophisticated and rigorous statistical techniques in order to study the business models of the digital press and all of its levels of analysis; and the combination of theoretical frameworks that link management and journalism studies. In this sense, the teachers responsible for the course plan to further develop these aspects in the coming academic years.

We also support the proposal of Ortiz Sobrino (2012), who argues that the training contents of the EHEA should provide students with the knowledge and competences that will allow them to work in the new convergent and multimedia context, and to this end highlights the importance of identifying students' professional motivations, expectations about university studies, and identity features in relation to media consumption. In this way, Ortiz Sobrino argues, the contents and teaching methods can be better adapted to the needs of the students so we can prevent their professional failure and stop them from dropping out of university.

Thus, by delving into these aspects which students found to be the most difficult (mainly the definition of the business model and the analysis of the context and the competition) and by identifying their professional motivations and expectations, we could help students to improve their performance in the course, and to produce better, more-defined and, therefore, more successful projects.

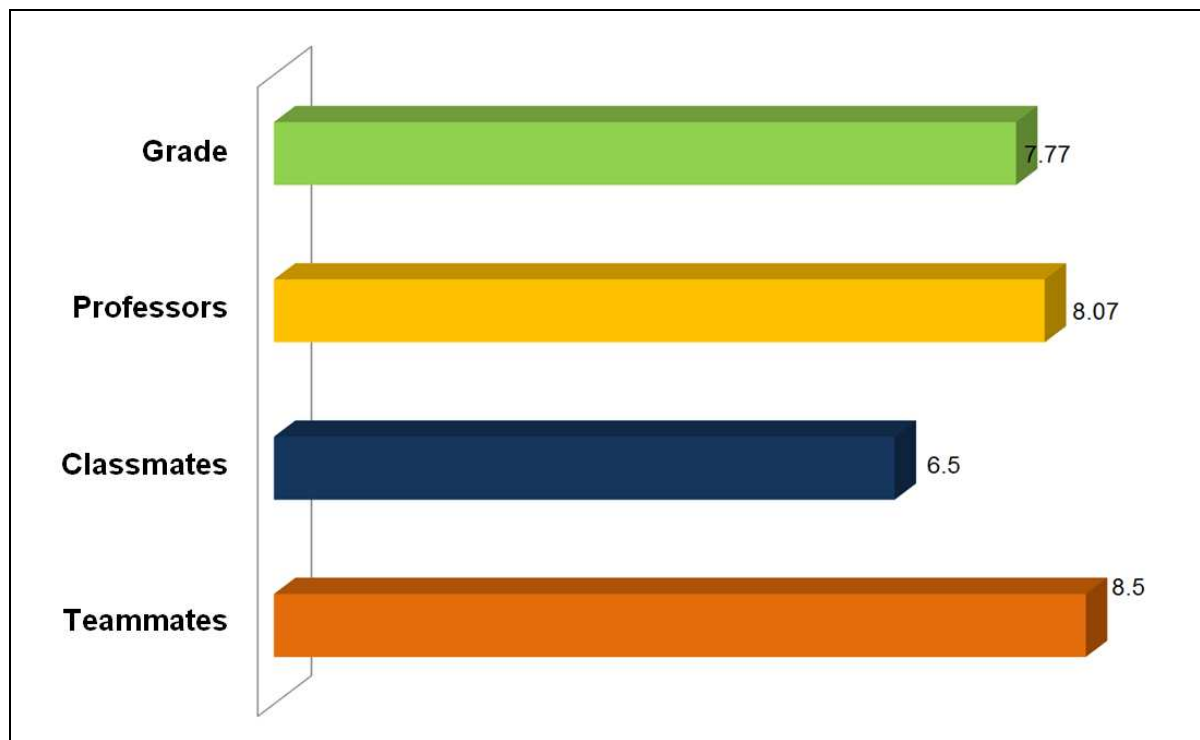
As mentioned, the business project, worth 60% of the final grade of the course, was evaluated in the following way: A grade was given by the teachers of the course, with a final value of 30% of the qualification; a grade was given by the whole class after the projects were presented and published on websites, blogs and social networks; and a grade was given by the members of the team presenting the project.

Thus, the average final grade of the class in this assignment was 7.77 out of 10. However, if we look at the average grades awarded by students and professors we can see that students were, in general, more critical of the projects and gave an average grade of 6.5, while professors gave an average of 8.07. For their part, the team members graded the project internally with an average of 8.5.

As a final reflection, it should be noted that in general the motivation of students with this assignment was quite high, to the point that each team attended the tutorials in seven out of eight occasions, and individual students attended the tutorials in 5 out of 6 occasions, motivated primarily by the interest in continuing with the project after the course. This idea reinforces the second hypothesis of this research study: if students are encouraged with contents and courses that are related to the creation and management of news media companies and offer alternative career opportunities, it is likely that many of these students will consider the option of creating a journalistic enterprise.

As a teaching support tools and as a complements to the virtual campus, Twitter and Facebook were also used throughout the course as tools of internal communication for the class. In the case of Twitter, we created a list with the enrolled students and teachers, who used the hashtag #CyGEmpInf to track information related to the course. In this case, Twitter was used mainly as a news board in the first phase of the course, and both students and teachers (even teachers of other courses) shared links to articles, initiatives, projects and bibliography of interest to the course. Debate between the media professionals from the province of Malaga and the students was also encouraged.

Figure 7. Grading of the business project



Source: Authors' own creation

In the second phase of teaching, once the business projects of each group had been developed and implemented, Twitter was also used for the presentation of the initiatives and even for the dissemination plan of each project, always with the aforementioned hashtag so that the information could be followed by the rest of the class. Thirteen of the business projects proposed by students in the course created a Twitter profile to disseminate the initiative among the class.

In addition, during this stage a Facebook page was created and each team used it to promote its business plan among the classmates. All students enrolled in the course continued as fans of the Facebook page of the course, which was exclusively used for the dissemination of the journalistic enterprise projects. Thus, all groups shared links to their websites or blogs, ads promoting their projects, and their corporate identity to advertise the project, a corporate presentation video or simply posted messages directed to their classmates.

Facebook was probably the social network that motivated students the most, since most of them have a Facebook account and use it more than other social networks. Most of the teams opened their own Facebook page to advertise their projects among their classmates and followers. Most students also shared their projects on their personal Facebook page, which generated interest in some cases.

4. Conclusions

Based on the literature review and the analysis of responses given by the students in the survey and the focus group, it seems clear that courses such as Creation and Management of News Media

Companies are increasingly necessary, not just in the journalism degrees, but in all or almost all university study programmes, particularly during the current context, in which the business model of news companies is undergoing profound changes as a consequence not only of the current economic crisis, but also as a result of changes in audience's news consumption habits and the emergence of new media platforms that offer new possibilities to generate news contents and new business models.

This is recognised by 91% of the surveyed students, who admit that after completing the course they have considered starting their own journalistic enterprise. Before taking the course only 39% of the students had considered this career option.

However, the students show a series of education deficiencies to be able to launch a business initiative, particularly in the areas of economics, business, budgeting and analysis of the context and the competition. This implies the need to improve the coordination with the professors teaching courses related to specialised journalism, digital journalism and new media, which is a new challenge for the next academic year.

Based on the results of the assignments completed by the students and their answers to the survey, there is a striking lack of interest in the specialisation in courses that currently, due to their characteristics and relation with the business environment, can offer more career opportunities, as for example in the tourism and health sectors. The census presented in the “2013 Annual Report of the Journalistic Profession” (*Informe de la Profesión Periodística de 2013*) neither includes specialised media companies in these sectors, which are still relevant in the Spanish economy.

For this reason, we need greater coordination with other disciplines to establish synergies and improve the “Creation and Management of News Media Companies” course, since the origin of any journalistic enterprise is in the knowledge of the other disciplines.

Other useful strategies is to search for synergies between the different study programmes offered by the University, and to try at some point in the course to put students from different study programmes together in order to encourage the creation of interdisciplinary enterprises or, alternatively, to include a communication student in each business project, since somehow all types of initiatives need communication.

It is also desirable to stimulate the relationship between the University and the business sector, in order to bring new journalistic projects to students and vice versa. In this case, the analysis shows that the proposal to document journalistic companies launched during the crisis and that still survive has been well valued by students, who used this assignment to either find out about other alternatives to traditional media, to gather information for the team business project or even, in some cases, to make contact with the companies in which they can work or apply for an internship.

Similarly, it is necessary to work in connection with society and the institutions that foster entrepreneurship in the immediate environment, through conferences, meetings and seminars, which will help students to better understand the regulations, possible aids, grants and different funding formulas, which are mostly unknown by students and may be useful to encourage the implementation of business projects.

Finally, we recommend the creation of an observatory of self-employed journalists, in order to be able to track the graduates who opted for this job option and to analyse their evolution, which can also be used to stimulate students.

* This research study is part of the teaching innovation projects of the University of Malaga (“Development of personal learning environments in the teaching of Journalism through the integration of web 2.0 resources”, [PIE 13-044](#)) and the Complutense University of Madrid (“Research and Learning of Media and Communications Management”), carried out by the authors of this article. Start of research: September 2013.

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