Article

Digital Storytelling in Sports Narrations: Employing Audiovisual Tools in Sport Journalism Higher Education Course

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Abstract: The present generation of young people who nowadays attend higher education curricula are accustomed to receiving information and knowledge through audiovisual material. Creating a digital story can assist students to learn more on the subject they study as well as to help them overcome obstacles that hinder the presentation of their gained knowledge. The aim of this paper was to examine the use of audiovisual tools in the educational procedure of sport journalism higher education courses. Thirty-eight students in the School of Journalism at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki were asked to present a team sport in a video form. Following the general instructions from the teachers they were able to use any kind of equipment and software they chose to create the audiovisual production. Upon the completion of the projects and based on an embedded mixed research design they were asked to answer a short questionnaire and afterwards to participate in two focus group discussions. The results revealed that the employment of technological tools to create, present, and furthermore express themselves was warmly accepted and the participants stated that it provided a vivid educational environment, which besides enhancing the process of teaching, contributed to the acquisition of skills and their right utilization.

Keywords: sports journalism; higher education; storytelling techniques; audiovisual narratives; embedded mixed research

1. Introduction

In recent years, the employment of audiovisual material in news dissemination is more than obvious. The evolution of broadband connections along with the ease-of-use of equipment and software utilized in audiovisual productions has brought about a burst in their use. As the younger generation, who is accustomed to learning through videos and is more capable of using technological devices, grow up, the need for good quality videos and the embedment of all possible techniques is inevitable. In the past years, it is not only the technology that has changed, but it is also the demands and expectations of the audience. Moreover, the forms of narration evolved too with the development of the technical means involved in their production, reaching their most appealing structure when the transfer of audio and video content became a reality [1].

The term *digital storytelling* involves the use of multimedia digital tools to tell a story, which when employed in journalism and media studies refers to wide-ranging new forms of digital narratives [2]. The employment of digital technologies has radically transformed education and learning in terms of enhancing collaboration among students and generating the motivation to engage themselves creatively in the procedure of learning rather than passively consuming knowledge. Especially, the utilization of digital audio and video technologies further innovatively involve the learners with tools they are accustomed to using in their everyday life [3,4]. Generation Z, the generation of young people born after 1995, characterized, among others, as "digital natives" [5], uses audiovisual productions to learn and creates them easily as a need to share their own stories on mobile screens, which

they favor. They are early adopters of innovation, and digital stories uploaded in social media by them are utilized as means of personal expression and connection. They lack attention span and, therefore, they do not keep watching for a long time [6,7].

Davis and Weinshenker [2] (p. 3) state that "*digital storytelling taps into youths' associations with screen media as preferred means of communication*". As innovative news dissemination practices are followed worldwide to reach these younger audiences, the content is becoming less text-oriented and multimedia features are embedded [8]. In this framework, more multimedia journalists are employed in the newsrooms, in a sense that they can tell a story across media platforms, such as audio, video, and web, since they can shoot, report, write, and edit their stories [9].

In the contemporary higher education environment, students must present their thoughts in an environment that encourages free speech, and they deserve more space regarding expressing their opinions in forms they are acquainted with. Distant and disengaged forms of teaching based mainly on written essays tend to be decreased and newer student empowering methods employing emotions are implemented [10]. Moreover, in Schools of Journalism and Media, where audiovisual productions and their interpretation are intrinsic in many of the courses, students should be encouraged to communicate their ideas with original productions of their own. Even further, this is a profound way of educating them in new media literacy by laying the foundations in enriched learning experience and not merely in transmitting knowledge [11,12]. Even further, in this way, some of the students may discover talents that they did not know they had and develop them along with the ability to evolve their critique on screen media.

Digital storytelling techniques in the educational procedure can foster critical digital literacy, which proves to be crucial in the current mediatized society, which demands the acquisition of skills and expertise in media handling both as producers and consumers. The narrative can be used as the basic structure-creating device for a meaningful production [13] in a broad-based education experience, and by understanding the multi-semiotic literacies derived from the diverse forms of elements used to produce concrete acts of storytelling [4], emergent news professionals are better prepared. Since, nowadays, equipment and multimedia authoring tools are easily accessed and the youth are familiar with their use, there is no reason for modern educational approaches to be restrained.

This study aims at providing a comprehensive and up-to-date students' point of view regarding their experience in a participatory pedagogical research project. Through the production of a short duration digital storytelling video that describes, either in terms of regulations or historically, a team sport, they were asked to participate in the educational procedure as active members rather than audience. After completing the production, the students that attend the course of Sports Journalism in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki were requested to state their experience in conjunction with their prior knowledge and the learning outcomes of the course.

The research questions are:

RQ1: Which are the journalistic skills that are considered as most important by undergraduate students of the sports journalism module?

RQ2: How is an innovative pedagogical procedure, which involves the concept, research, and deployment of a digital storytelling production evaluated by the students of the sports journalism module?

RQ3: How is the lived experience of a digital storytelling production perceived by the students of the sports journalism module and which aspects does it detect? Is the element of bonus grading involved in that perception?

RQ4: Through the lived experience of the digital storytelling production and having probably confronted encountered problems, which audiovisual features are evaluated as significant by the student-creators for the comprehension of story?

In the next chapters, initially, a short reference on the contemporary technologies applied in journalism, as well as on sports news in the current media landscape will be made.

Consequently, the framework of the course will be deployed, and the methodology followed will be justified in Section 2 (Materials and Methods). Afterwards, the results of the research, both quantitative and qualitative, will be presented in Section 3 (Results), categorized in sub-sections. Finally, in the discussion part, the conclusions will be highlighted, and the limitations of the study will be presented along with future work suggestions.

Current Technologies in Journalism

Contemporary digital platforms that facilitate new forms of journalism, such as long-form journalistic narratives, have emerged and nowadays they are considered the norm, combining new technologies with media and journalism. New genres in digital story-telling, such as i-docs that may provide vivid representations, are produced to reach the new-styled audiences [14]. The user's experience and behavioral trends, specifically those of the younger cohorts, are becoming a priority in news dissemination; thus, the audience is reached through innovative ways resulting from the conjunction of technology with the story. Selective deepening on interactive resources along with multiple points of view are among the features provided that are favored by younger audiences who search for the engagement. Even further, the concept of immersive journalism as a form in which the audience/user, with the aid of virtual reality (VR) technologies, can have first-person experiences due to a virtually reconstructed scenario depicting the story [15,16], is based on the desire to bring the audience into the heart of the events, which is exactly what a good journalistic storytelling can achieve. The creation of a connection between the audience and the news story via all means available may transfer all the emotions of the narrative.

A journalist will still need critical thinking, building contacts, and good writing skills, however, competence in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), audiovisual equipment and software included, will assist in the process of finding and delivering news in a more enhanced and complete form [17–20]. Although the core skills remain the same, the means to achieve the best result change and multi-skilling is an essential part in the era of convergence journalism. The adoption of a variety of media results in the creation of a lively story, which will engage readers quicker and easier [21]. Flexibility, which is considered a virtue in the profession, can be expressed either when looking for sources or working with up-to-date equipment. A significant number of journalists either produce news for more than one platform or in the medium they work for they must produce the same piece of news in multiple ways of [22]. The modern curriculum vitae of a journalist should include a portfolio of audiovisual productions and the best way to create them is as course projects under the supervision of professors.

Nowadays, the extended use of smartphones for news acquisition has penetrated news markets affecting journalism and has brought about the need for new digital practices for producing content in forms for these devices such as short videos, podcasting, and live blogging. Even the shape of visual news has changed, and it has turned to horizontal story-telling due to the extended use of mobile devices and their way of navigation. Furthermore, as Instagram stories with animated slideshows, integrating pictures, videos, texts, and stickers, became popular, journalists have started using these tools to tell their own mobile stories [23]. As Hutchins and Boyle [24] (p. 5) state, "*there is interrelationship between formats of news and the practices that produce it, with each affecting the other*". In other respects, as the technology embedded in these devices evolve (better cameras and improved software), they become powerful tools both for professionals and amateurs. The impact of the chang-ing nature of news dissemination is a factor from which the journalist can be benefited since there are many opportunities to publish in forms and platforms for these devices and get rapidly known [25]. In this aspect, Casero-Ripollés, et al. [26] state that although journalism students consider it as preferred to be positioned as a salaried professional, the contemporary journalism professionals value the ability to identify business opportunities in the new digital context and the training capacity in that context should be strengthened to improve the adaptation of journalism to the new social and economic context.

2. Materials and Methods

The sports journalism undergraduate module at the School of Journalism and Mass Communications curriculum at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki is the only autonomous Sports Journalism module offered at a Greek Higher Education Program of Studies. It has been taught since the academic year 2015–2016, for seven years up to now, both in winter and spring semesters, and students from both Schools' paths (journalism and communication), in their third year of study, select it among the elective choices and participate in the class optionally.

Its purpose is to provide students with the appropriate skills and knowledge in sports reporting/media. The syllabus includes theoretical background of sports journalism history, the sports journalist profession, sports news evaluation, hierarchy and interpretation, multimedia writing and reporting skills, sport language, investigative journalism, data journalism, etc., and it is developed in 13-week term lectures in a classroom. During the COVID-19 lockdown of the academic year 2020–2021, it was transferred exclusively online and nowadays is performed in a hybrid form. The module is enhanced with live experience process for the students to understand the transition to the real/professional world. For example, experienced sports journalists are welcomed as visitors in the class, where they narrate their work experiences and interact with the students, answering to their questions. As Matsiola et al. [3] (p. 5) suggest, this process "*create a vivid teaching atmosphere and result in a more comprehensive attitude towards the theory of the course*". Moreover, the students are constantly encouraged to take part in the overall discussion, to share their opinions, and criticize on taught sports material.

The teaching staff, which is present in all cases participating in the educational procedure, consists of an Associate Professor with expertise in the Research Methods and Psychometrics and a professional sports journalist who holds an MSc in Sports Management with specialty in Sports Media and is currently a PhD candidate in Sports Media Journalism and Communication. A tenured Senior Instructor in Electronic Media courses and an electrical and computer engineer who holds a PhD degree in New Technologies in Journalism actively participated in project's completion.

At the start of the winter semester of 2020, the students that enrolled in the course were informed by the professors that the video production was as a part of an experimental, since an unprecedented methodology was applied, research project on enhanced forms of teaching in the framework of learning through practice. The necessary guidelines were initially explained and afterwards uploaded on the online platform (www.elearning.auth.gr, accessed on 10 November 2021) that hosts the material and is used as a communication path between teachers and students. Initially, the term digital storytelling was explained using academic theory and examples and afterwards the technical aspects were given, finally all the questions were answered.

As the participants were students in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications, this project was completely related to their future professional needs. Initially, they had to find a topic and to perform research around it via many sources (interviews with experts, web sources, etc.), evaluate and select the applicable content as an employed journalist would do. Afterwards, they had to write the story by determining its purpose and selecting the emotional tone. Furthermore, they had to make it last until the duration that was set for the production; this procedure involves extensive text editing. In parallel, they had to find or shoot/record the audiovisual material that would be used for the visualization of their story, comprehending the correct usage of each part, and finally combine all the elements along with the inclusion of graphics via the employment of video editing techniques, thus, producing a digital story. Following this path, they would have to practice the journalistic skills they acquired in the School and bridge the theoretical/practical divide. The students were asked to work in the project individually since the purpose was to receive personal opinions for every level of the production (concept and deployment). They were encouraged to use their everyday devices (cell phones and personal computers or laptops) and free or open-source software to fulfill the obligations of the production.

This was decided on purpose to realize that the endeavor was not something that was highly demanding in terms of technology use and even more since technology is constantly evolving, the point is to focus on *learning to learn* and adapt to new tools and platforms [27]. Furthermore, they were told that they were free to use material found on the Internet or exchange with one another in terms of collaboration. Especially since the COVID-19 pandemic set restrictive parameters, assisting each other in joint efforts was proposed. Of course, the absolute importance of mentioning the source was pointed out and they were also encouraged to search for creative common shared material.

The concept was, through empowering the students to develop their point of view freely without constraints and using their own aesthetics and critical opinion, to challenge them to communicate their ideas. The expression of personal emotions was inevitable, however, it was a basic foundation in the engagement in the project since some of them were, or still are, athletes in the sport they chose to present. Through this research, among others, the personal impact of the production was sought as a part of the holistic teaching methodology that perceives students as an entity and attempts to reveal their talents. Nevertheless, the participants were invited to undertake the project through the lens of their personal experience, but not lose the part of investigating and discovering new aspects as a journalist should do. The critically reflective aspect of their work was pointed out. The students could communicate during the project with the teachers and express their questions either on the creative or on the technological part of the production. This could happen either during the online courses where everyone could participate in the discussion or through personal communication via email. The main guidelines that were given were to create more than one draft and attempt to reflect their story from many different perspectives to overcome obstacles. Technological support was provided in large scale to avoid withdrawal caused by equivalent problems. Connecting theory to practice in the beginning is not easy and it is for the best that it is achieved during educational procedures and not in real work environment situations.

The productions, once they were completed, were projected online during the course. Prior to the projection, the participants were asked to complete a questionnaire and afterwards to participate in a focus group discussion. These two tools were selected to address the research purpose in the framework of the embedded mixed design research [28] where both quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed (Figure 1). The researchers' priority lies in the data derived from the qualitative method (QUAL) of the focus group, while the quantitative data (QUAN) will be used supportively for the depth of understanding of the main research method. This approach was decided since different questions needed to be answered, and each type of question required different types of data [28]. Findings of both methods are integrated to the results and the conclusions of the research (Figure 1).
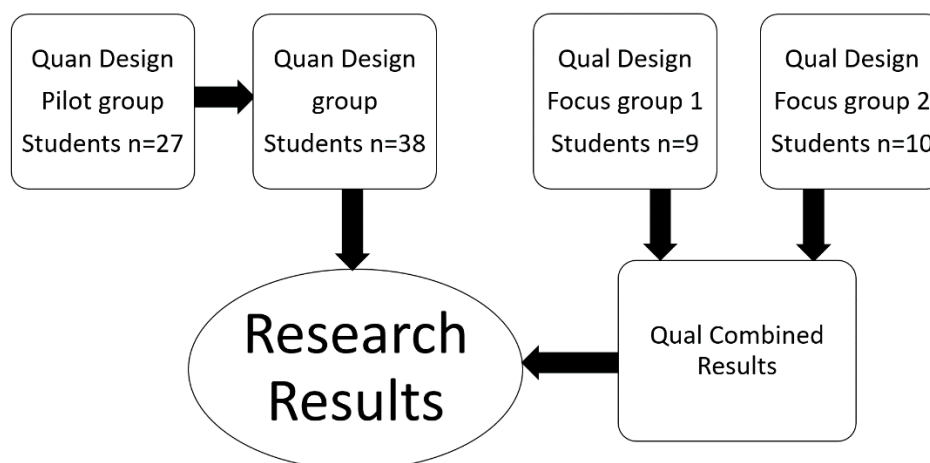

Figure 1. The framework of the embedded mixed design research methodology followed in the study.

The questionnaire consisted of 31 questions, 27 closed-ended and four open-ended (Appendix A). The students were asked to evaluate in a five-point Likert scale in terms of importance evaluation (1—absolutely important, 5—not at all important), certain skills, found in the literature review [18,29–31] and also derived from the personal professional experience by the researchers (as teachers and journalists) that a journalist should possess, such as good writing skills, research desire but also on-air ability and digital editing skills. Additionally, they were asked regarding their former experience with sports, such as whether they have been athletes, or still are. Moreover, their former experience with audiovisual production was interrogated, such as whether they have taken relevant courses, if they have created their own videos in the past, the software they used, etc. Finally, the last category of questions was related to the specific course of Sports Journalism and their willingness to become sports journalists themselves.

The focus group discussion was mainly centralized in the educational character of the endeavor. The questions that fueled the conversation concerned the aspect of the interest that was aroused through a procedure that was out of the ordinary teaching methodology, the acquired satisfaction from the production, the difficulties encountered, etc. Furthermore, additional topics that were examined were the usefulness of the project as well as the future impact of the knowledge and skills that were gained. Another aspect of the procedure that was discussed concerned the motivations that urged the students to participate and especially the bonus grading parameter.

2.1. Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies arise from different ontological and epistemological positions [32–34], collecting data with different methods and providing different types of information: open-ended data in the case of qualitative (QUAL) and closed-ended data in the case of quantitative (QUAN) ones [35]. Each form presents both limitations and strengths [36], which has caused a long academic discussion, leading scholars who supported either to the so-called paradigm war, which supported/claimed incompatibility between the two paradigms [37]. Considering that none of the methods or approaches is regarded as the best, since in the real/pragmatic world, research gives primacy to the importance of the research problem and question, and the way this will be best answered [38,39]. A third paradigm, the paradigm of mixed methods, has emerged as a solution to this war [40]. Tashakkori and Creswell [41] (p. 4) defined mixed methods, "*as research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry*".

This study was conducted under the principles of an embedded mixed methods design [28], adopting the view that combining both QUAN and QUAL "*helps in providing a better understanding of the research problem which is not possible through a single approach*" [42] (p. 40). Initially, it focuses on collecting quantitative data while embedding the qualitative data (both under the principles of scientific realism philosophy) to provide supportive information regarding sports media students' perceptions at a Greek Higher Education course [43,44]. Realism is a family of related doctrines and theses and involves a commitment to the idea that "out there", there is a real world of which "*we are part regardless of our knowledge and beliefs, or the ways in which its social structures can be constructed and interpreted*" [45] (p. 189). Especially scientific or epistemological realism, whose principles/philosophy on the production of knowledge guided this study, asserts that "*both the observable and unobservable features of the world can be known by the appropriate use of scientific methods*" [46] (p. 3), or, as Rennie [47] (p. 322) put it, "the phenomenon exists "out there", awaiting discovery, like a fossil in a stratum". The two divergent data sets together include joint displays and side-by-side comparisons. As Ziegler [44] (p. 927) proposed, "this facilitates data comparison, an analysis-level strategy for generating meta-inferences and allows a researcher to concisely report the inferences drawn".

In the preliminary phase of the embedded mixed methods, quantitative research was conducted among all students that were enrolled in the course. Afterwards, to reveal a thorough understanding of the subject under study, semi-structured interviews investigating student perception were conducted with a purposefully selected subgroup of the participants.

Initially, fifty-nine (*n* = 59) undergraduate students who attend the Sports Journalism course at the School of Journalism and Mass Media at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, District of Macedonia, were approached during online class time [48] in early October 2020 and were invited to participate in the study. The gender allocation was 34 women and 25 men. The aim and benefits of the study were explained three more times, during class hours from both researchers, as well as the fact that their participation was voluntary [43]. Students were asked to produce, for educational purposes, a two-minute digital storytelling production for a team sport (i.e., soccer, basketball, etc.) and deliver it to the researchers. Twenty-three (*n* = 23) digital stories were finally produced, which is less than half of the students enrolled in the course. However, this was somehow expected by the teachers since the students had not been involved in a similar educational procedure in the past and they were reluctant. Furthermore, as stated by themselves in the focus group discussions, they lacked the skills to perform such a task and that made them hesitant. Another factor that prohibited the participation was the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown that made some of them lose their interest in the educational process. Finally, since the course is an elective one, some of the students, finally, chose not to complete it. They, who created the digital storytelling productions during November and December 2020, received one degree bonus in the semester's final grade. Demographic data collected consisted only of gender.

Although the guidelines that were set initially concerned only team sports, finally, upon request by the students, the professors accepted other sports as well since the participation in the project was considered more important. Therefore, the sports selected to be presented were soccer, basketball, volleyball, beach volleyball, handball, American football, judo, skateboard, jiu-jitsu, wheelchair basketball, tennis, and synchronized swimming. In most of the productions, the sport was analyzed in terms of regulations and only in four out of the 23 was presented historically. Regarding the creation of the videos, audiovisual material and photos found on the Internet were mainly used. There were cases in which original material was shot and in one case the student used the computer camera to capture himself while explaining the regulations of the sport and inserted this video as a picture-in-picture technique while in two other cases, interviews with experts were conducted online. There was only one production that conducted an interview and shot b-roll material as well. To describe the visual content, voice over and animations, mainly in the form of moving titles, were inserted, in some of the cases in combination. The students, to make their productions more interesting, used motion effects in presenting the static images and photos, thus making them more appealing. Finally, music was employed in all productions.

2.2. Instruments

At the second stage, which constituted phase 1 of the research, a Google form web link was distributed to participants via Zoom chat, during online class on 2 December 2020, ensuring anonymous results. The aim was to collect quantitative data as a pilot test, and 27 students (*n* = 15 women and *n* = 12 men) completed it. After receiving students' responses and comments, the questionnaire was further adjusted by authors, and its link was sent via the academic email to all the 59 enrolled students on 7 December 2020, which was a day after the deadline for delivering the digital stories. An email reminder was sent two days later and again two days before the survey closed on 13 December 2020 [48]. Totally, 38 students (21 women, 15 men and two students that did not want to state their gender) completed the survey (64.4% response rate); in this way, phase 2 of the research was completed. The number of the students that completed the survey was higher than the number of those delivering a video production, however, this does not constitute a problem

in the analysis of the results since they all belong to the same population as students of the same course. The questionnaire was used as exploratory tool and the researchers tried to see the general perceptions of the students, regardless of how many had already participated/decided to participate in the video production project. Furthermore, it had been assumed in advance that not all students would participate; however, the general perceptions of the population were sought, and based on these, the focus group questions were formulated.

The results of the quantitative survey were used to develop the focus group questions guide and the semi-structured interview guide (open ended questions) was employed to collect qualitative data, and then two focus groups, consisting of ten participants each, were conducted during class on 16 December 2020, and video was recorded digitally via Zoom after receiving students' acquiescence, which was phase 3 of the research. The use of digital audio recordings "permits the indexing of transcripts with 'time markers'" [49] (p. 73).

Only twenty (20) of the students who produced the digital video wished to participate in the focus groups interviews. One participant of the first focus group initially participated, but during the interview lost the Internet connection, so was excluded from the conversation. Thus, nineteen (19) students were asked open ended, non-directional questions about their lived experience of the digital story production. For example:

- What do you think of the process?
- Considering it an experience, how would you describe it?
- Is this your first audiovisual project?
- How do you perceive the result of this personal video production?
- How do you think this production will contribute in the future to your courses and even your work?
- From an educational point of view, what do you think about it?
- Was the bonus degree a reason for making the video production?
- Which features of the production do you consider have contributed to its better understanding by the public?
- To your understanding, what are the purposes this video can be used for?
- Based on your engagement with social media, on which platform do you think it would have greater impact and visibility?
- Will you upload it to one of your own social media profiles?

Data that were produced by the focus group interviews were prepared and transcribed verbatim [49], while simultaneously listening repeatedly [45], following Mergenthaler and Stinson's [50] (pp. 129–130) seven rules for transcription standards. Subsequently, they were analyzed inductively [51], according to the principles of thematic analysis [52]. The proposals of Braun and Clarke [53], Creswell [35], and Willig [34] were followed in a process of methods triangulation to achieve higher credibility [54,55]. At the same time, a scientific reflection of the researchers was conducted [32]. The transcribed data were read twice, and the first detailed notes were kept. Initial codes, several of them in vivo, which means they emerged from the phrases of the participants themselves [34], were assigned, and a code book was produced. A total of 416 (189 + 227 of 1st and 2nd group respective) codes were generated, expressing basic concepts and ideas of the data. In the next stage, initially, codes were revised where necessary and secondary ones were assigned and grouped. As (qualitative) researchers working within a realist framework analyze their data intending to discover categories within it [54], after their grouping, 20 categories and 31 subcategories emerged.

Additionally, participants' responses were reviewed by the first two researchers of the present study in an open, summative analysis on the content which involves "counting and comparisons, usually of keywords or content, followed by the interpretation of the underlying context" as suggested by Hsieh and Shannon [56] (p. 1277). Thus, a "deeper understanding and explanation of the phenomenon under investigation" [56] (pp. 1283–1285) emerged. Inferences made based on the results from each strand were finally "synthesized

to form meta-inferences at the end of the study" as suggested by Teddlie and Tashakkori [57] (p. 20).

At the next step, conceptual similarities and differences were grouped into thematic categories [56], which led to the overall meta-themes that emerged afterwards. The data extracted were in depth and detailed, rich, and complete, scientifically strong [53], and the analysis reached theoretical saturation. Achieving a saturation point in the thematic analysis is important for the validity of the study according to Ando et al. [51].

The next step concerned the improvement or the revision of the prospective themes and some of them had to be rejected, others to be compacted or some to be analyzed in individual topics [55]. Therefore, a satisfactory frame of the composition of the different thematic areas was formed, along with the way they fit together and what they imply for the data. Thematic units were finalized, and subthemes were created to facilitate the drawing of conclusions and help the reader, in the cases where the original themes were considered extensive and complex. This stage was completed with the attribution of definitions and the naming of the seven (7) in total final themes as well as their subthemes, two (2) in total, too. During this process, excerpts from the data were transferred to each thematic and sub-thematic area, providing a clear understanding for each one of them. The above analytic and detailed presentation of the study's route enables its "audit trial" [58] (p. 11), as it allows readers to identify the researchers' thought/logic and helps other researchers to "determine whether the study's findings may be relied upon as a platform for further inquiry" [58] (p. 16). Therefore, this is the first serious factor of reliability in researchers' judgment.

Hsieh and Shannon [56] proposed that credibility of a study can also be established through activities such as peer debriefing, triangulation, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checks. So, to ensure the reliability of the research, the combined tool was validated for its reliability by a methodology expert [48], and an independent analyst provided feedback of the study [45], contributing to the formulation of "an accurate, comprehensive, rich, extended descriptive report", as suggested by Ramsook [59] (p. 22). Dependability of this study was also achieved through the "discussion among the researchers and identification and consensus about the findings" [48] (p. 420), while the textual evidence is consistent with the interpretation [56]. In conclusion, the criteria for validity and reliability, as set by Yardley [60] and revised by Tracy [61], are met. Moreover, as the two data sources provide similar conclusions, "the results have greater credibility" [62] (p. 2143).

Having in mind Bryman's [32] suggestion for more attention needed to be given "to the writing of mixed methods articles", the last step of the analysis/study concerned the production of the academic report. Such a report replies to the research questions [63] with discussion and interpretation [64] that give answers to the questions of how and why, explaining the various aspects of the phenomenon under investigation [34]. The interpretations of the results were drawn mainly from the literature review.

The final report included only the most prominent/important excerpts from the participants' accounts data, analyzed by the principles of Braun and Clarke [52,63], as they were identified as typical of the patterns identified in the data [45,55]. For the purposes of this study, extracts have been translated from Greek to English by the authors, considering what [65] (p. 206) notices: a "translation unavoidably involves the danger of losing subtleties of meaning". Consequently, the analysis of the qualitative data findings will be presented in themes as derived from the focus group interviews with the students who took part in the research. They will be presented in terms of significance based on the scopes of the research. The coding employed, e.g., S3a-16, stands for Student no.3 of the first focus group (a), transcript code 16.

The combined tool was assessed and validated by a methodology expert, for its reliability [48]. The analysis of the transcribed data from the two focus group interviews revealed a number of important themes and subthemes, which are the following and will be presented consequently:

- Theme 1: Research as a teaching model
- Theme 2: The usefulness of research in the course framework
- Theme 3: The lived experience of video production
- Theme 4: The scoring bonus fundamental/basic motivation
  Sub-theme 4(a): The individual motivations
- Theme 5: The difficulty in using video editing software and further production issues
  Sub-theme 5(a): Problems encountered in the video production process
- Theme 6: The powerful image and the storytelling
- Theme 7: YouTube as preferred platform

3. Results

After collecting the data, both the quantitative from the questionnaires and the qualitative from the focus group, the researchers initiated the dual analysis. Consequently, all findings will be presented commencing with the quantitative ones, which could not be extracted from the focus group procedure.

3.1. Quantitative Research Findings

The analysis of the data derived from the questionnaire, which is considered the preliminary phase of the embedded mixed methods design, was performed with SPSS version 25, using mainly descriptive statistics.

In the first part of the quantitative survey, in order to reply to the RQ1, Which are the journalistic skills that are considered as most important by undergraduate students of sports journalism module?, the participants were asked to state their opinion regarding skills that a journalist should possess. The skills that were selected were the following: research, good-writing, conducting an interview, critical thinking, general computer use, multimedia skills, audiovisual equipment use, audiovisual editing, news transmission through web and social media platforms, on-air ability, adaptability to new forms of editing and transmitting news, and "life-learning" willingness on innovative systems in journalism. As presented in Figure 2, the students rated all the questioned skills very highly, the mean values ranged from 1.38 to 2.17.
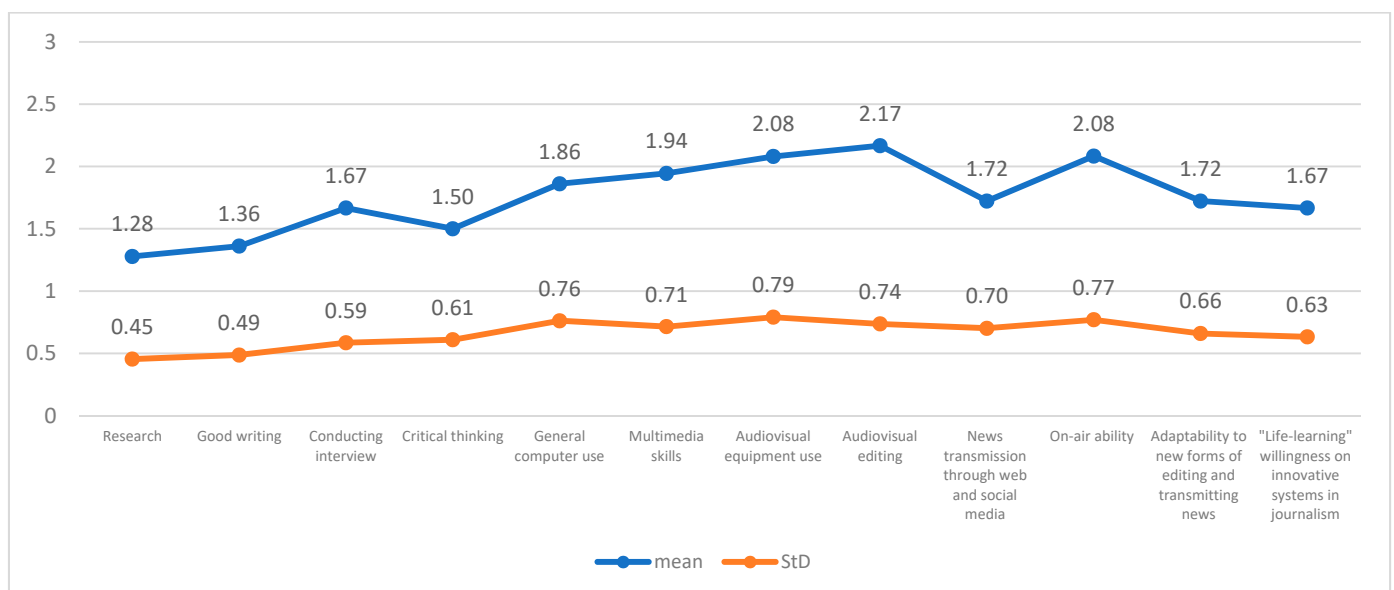

Figure 2. Usefulness of journalistic skills (Mean and Standard Deviation values).

Research (mean = 1.32, StD = 0.47) and good writing (mean = 1.34, StD = 0.48) were the two skills that were ranked highest and audiovisual editing (mean = 2.17, StD = 0.74) was the lowest. Regarding the category of the rest of the audiovisual skills, the participants

rated them closely, yet less than important (audiovisual equipment use: mean = 2.08, StD = 0.78, and on-air ability: mean = 2.11, StD = 0.76). As derived from these findings, and through the authors' knowledge of the school's curriculum, the students' firm belief in the journalistic skills is positioned on the basic undoubted skills of the profession. As they have not been in the market yet and they have not been acquainted with audiovisual technologies in their courses, these results were somewhat expected.

In the next part of the questionnaire, the students were asked whether they are interested in becoming sport journalists and in the case of affirmative answer their preferred medium to work in (In which medium would you like to work?). According to the results, 44.7% stated they would like to work as sport journalists, 21.1% they do not want to, and the rest, 34.2%, have not decided yet. Concerning the medium they would like to work in, they were given the chance to reply for each one of the following: newspaper, TV, radio, and website. Through observing Figure 3 (the horizontal axis represents the number of answers), interesting conclusions can be drawn. Newspaper is the least chosen medium (mean = 3.44) where websites (mean = 2.23) and TV (mean = 2.33) are the most preferable. Rather intriguing is the choice of radio (mean = 2.44) not as a first choice but highly ranked as a second one.
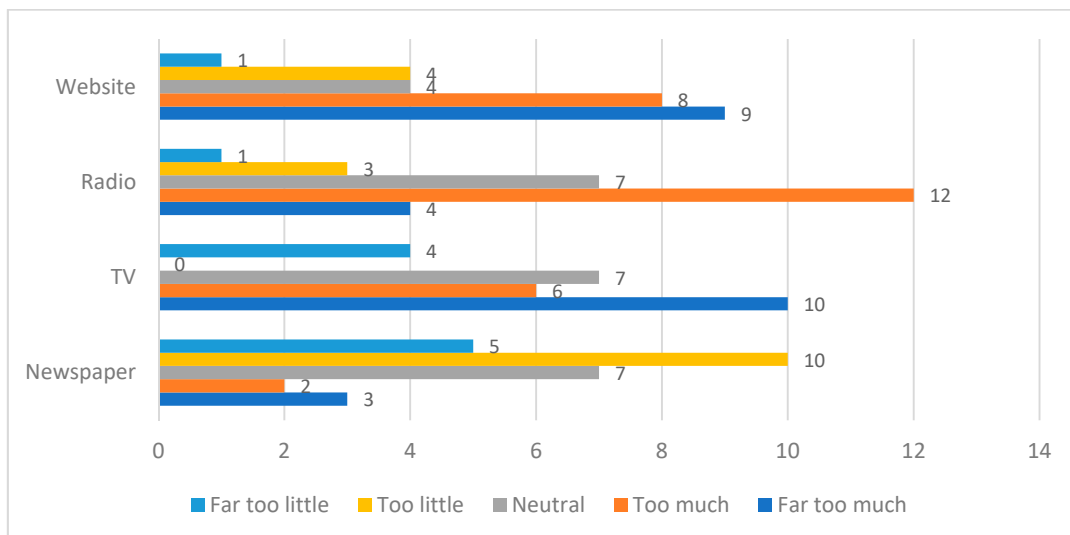

Figure 3. Preferred medium to work in (frequencies).

Although audiovisual skills, as discussed previously, were not considered as absolutely important, television is the favored medium for most of the respondents (it presents the larger number of responds on the answer "far too much" in Figure 3). In this framework, a rather interesting finding was revealed after performing cross-tabulation statistics regarding the skill of on-air ability. None of the participants that would like very much to work on television considered on-air ability as an absolutely important skill. This finding reveals an inconsistency in the students' perceptions, which, however, may be interpreted since the population of the current research mainly consists of students in the third year of study that most of them have not yet worked or even joined the practice program of the school. Through the practice program, which is offered in the fourth year of study, the students may work in media organizations as paid journalists in real situations. Their opinion on the professional skills after this procedure is altered.

Most of the participants (71.1%) had been involved in sports as athletes themselves and 14.8% of them at a professional level, either in team (i.e., basketball, football, etc.) or in individual (i.e., swimming, judo, etc.) sports. This activity provided them general knowledge of sports, which can be very useful in reporting and in an extended view handling information in a broader societal and financial framework.

Even though 63.2% of the students had not attended courses on audiovisual equipment handling, many of them (73.7%), prior to this project, had used audiovisual equipment (even a cell-phone camera) and more than half of them (57.9%) had created a production not for personal usage but in the framework of another course. These values indicate the wide adoption of audiovisual equipment as part of the everyday activities of the participants. The extended use of social media and the forms of the material that are used for communicating their news (audio and video included), along with the ease-of-use of contemporary devices, mainly smartphones, lead to this widespread usage.

Consequently, they were asked to state whether they watch sports videos and according to their answers, half of them (50%) watch sports videos every day. As presented in Figure 4 (the horizontal axis represents the number of answers), YouTube is the preferred choice, followed by dedicated sport sites. On the contrary, satellite and streaming TV channels are the least used for that purpose; however, it has to be mentioned that those services operate under payment and that may be a reason for not selecting them. However, they do not watch TV channels online that are free of charge either. This finding is in accordance with the results of [6], where it was also observed that despite the opportunity offered for a more personalized viewing experience, the participants seem less interested in traditional TV's content in all screens.
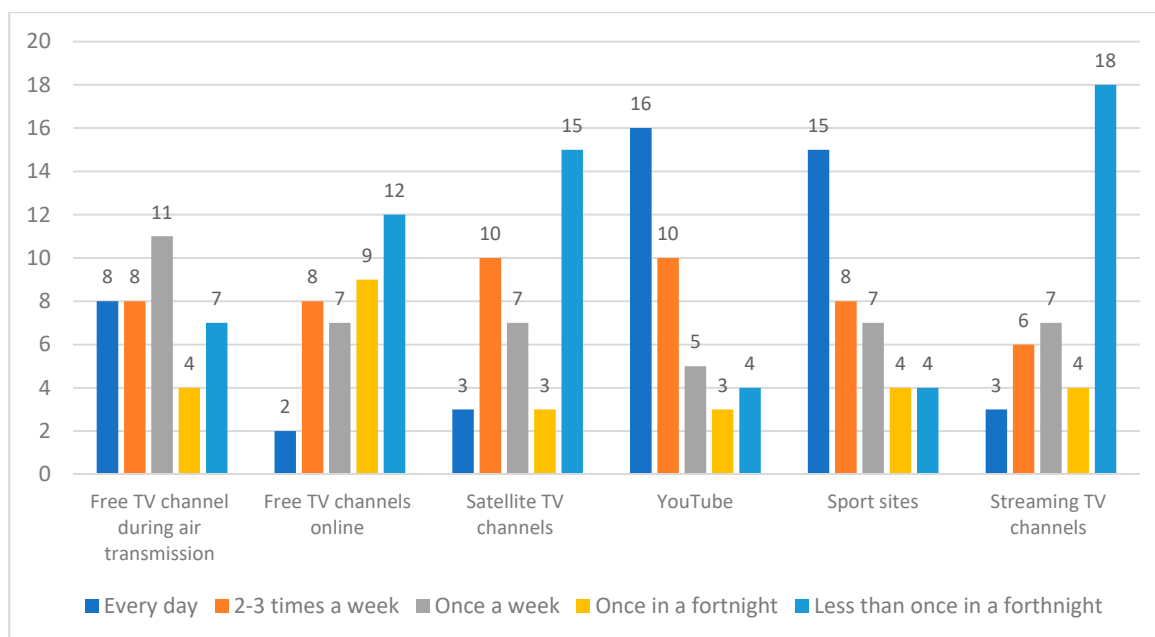

Figure 4. Frequency of watching sports videos (frequencies).

Furthermore, they were asked whether they watch any athletic team's channel online either via the team's site or via YouTube. In Figure 5, the findings reveal that they are not really watching specific teams' channels. These results are in line to the ECA 2020 [66] findings. According to the primary consumer research that was carried out in seven markets (UK, Spain, Germany, Poland, Netherlands, India, and Brazil), more than half of fans (52.6%) consider that "Football clubs and organisations should invest in more digital content" (49% in UK and 54% in Spain). Although 88% of all football fans follow football news all the time to make sure they are fully updated, 68% state that they prefer watching football live at a stadium than watching on the TV.
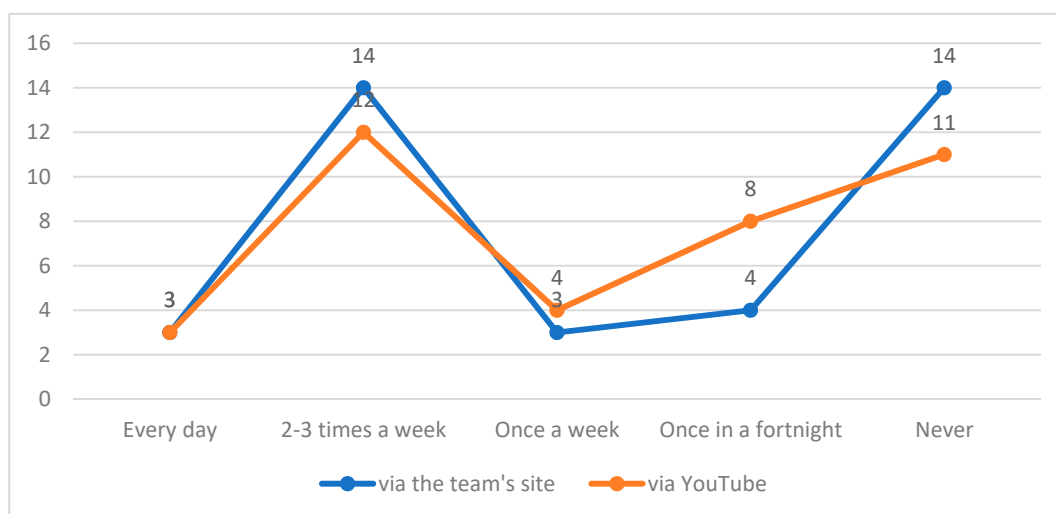
Figure 5. Frequency of watching online athletic teams' channel (frequencies).

Regarding the question why they were enrolled in the course, six (15.78%) of the students stated clearly, "because it is the profession I want to pursue in the future", 21 (55.26%) replied more generally "because I like/am interested in sports and sports reporting (11, 28.94%)" and "to get acquainted with the terms of sports and the way sports journalism works (10, 26.31%)". The rest of the answers were broader "I wanted to find out if I like sports journalism (5, 13.15%)", "to see the position of sports in the field of journalism (2, 5.26%)", "I chose the course to try something different, against my interests (1, 2.63%)", "Interesting and special object (2, 5.26%)" and "I have no knowledge of sports journalism and through this course I wanted to get to know the industry and gain sufficient knowledge (1, 2.63%)". The distribution of the results is totally understandable as more than half of the answers are related to those who are interested in sports (either as athletes or fans) and sports reporting. As mentioned in the Materials and Methods section, this course is the only one of its kind offered in a Greek university, therefore, for those interested in this field, it provides the opportunity to acquire high level knowledge on the subject. The rest of the answers are more or less related to the general perspectives of the students when enrolling in elective courses.

As already stated, 23 students created an audiovisual production, however only seven (30.43%) performed their own shootings; specifically, six of them used their computer (PC or laptop) camera since due to the COVID-19 pandemic they performed their interviews through teleconferencing applications and just one (4.34%) used the mobile phone camera. The rest of the participants used material that they found online either royalty free or commercial. In every case, they credited the sources they used. Finally, three (13.04%) of the students edited their production with applications on their mobile phones and the rest using either free open-source software (like Openshot free video editor https://www. openshot.org/ accessed on 10 November 2021) or software that was already incorporated in their computer (such as iMovie or Windows movie maker).

3.2. Qualitative Analysis

3.2.1. Theme 1: Research as a Teaching Model

The main theme that emerged from the thematic analysis of the data through the transcription of the focus group interviews, was "Research as a teaching model". The vast majority of students (13/19, e.g., S3a-16, 68, S4a-25, S6a-35, S4b-157, S10b-170) stated that the process of video production in the course Sports Journalism was for them an original, modern, and interactive teaching, and, therefore, the course was "easy to follow" (S7b-165). For example, S1a-87 said that he has a slight distraction, but this way of teaching helped

him in relation to others and, therefore, " . . . I believe that the rest of the lessons should be done in a similar way."

For an even larger majority of students (16/19, e.g., S1a-4, 108, 109, 110, 111, S4a-117, S9a-50, S2b-94, 176, 177, S8b-104, 188, 189), the process of video production significantly fills the gap between the teaching and the occupation landscape and will help them mainly later, in their working life, and in the rest of their educational course. For S4b-181 "it was an early test for everyone", while for S7b-187 it offered "variety in the sameness of the theoretical form of teaching". Several students reported gaining pre-work experience (e.g., S5a-103,107,) with the parallel acquisition and cultivation of digital skills (e.g., S1a-4, S8b-167) and journalistic practices (e.g., S2a-114) in view of their future working life (S1a-111, S5a-103). S10b-172 stated, for example, that, "I learned how to write interview questions", while S1b-175 said that the video he created "was an opportunity to practice further". On the other hand, for some of the students, the coverage of the gap is partial ("does not cover it completely", S6b-185), or simply helps for the future (S5b-182), even in assignments of other courses (S4b-219), that is, in their university education course.

Among the reasons mentioned to support that the specific way of teaching was considered as a teaching model, was that the use of image and sound together with the supplementary material constitute a pleasant combination and lead to enhanced learning in relation to just reading textual material (S3a-16, S6a-35, S2b-154). In fact, S3a-68 suggested during the coronavirus period, the examinations at school to be executed by producing and watching such video productions instead of presenting assignments in the form of slide shows, or otherwise, with videos incorporated in the slide shows. The students, in terms of the originality of the teaching of the course, mentioned the production of videos mainly by themselves (S1b-149), the understanding of modern technological tools and applications (e.g., Zoom) that provide journalists "many options and alternatives in everyday work" (S4b-159) and the "application of interview techniques", especially the interviewee approach techniques (S4b-158). The procedure gave other students the opportunity to "get to know and learn more about other sports" (S9b-169), as well as to S10b-171 to learn about American football. In fact, the acquired skills are expected to be useful (S1a-111), even if the students do not follow the profession of journalism, as stated by S2a-113. Finally, one student (S5a-106) stated that there was achieved specialization in the field of sports journalism due to the sports content of the video, while another considers that both he and his classmates managed to develop critical journalistic thought (S2a-112,114, 115).

3.2.2. Theme 2: The Usefulness of Research in the Course Framework

The second theme that emerged from the study was "The usefulness of research in the course framework". The participants explained how they perceived the whole process in terms of acquiring knowledge, what kind of effect it had on them, while they also proceeded to a slightly more positive critique than appointing negative comments on the work of their colleagues.

Nine out of the 19 students stated that they perceived the process of video production in the course, as: (a) an opportunity to acquire knowledge and/or deepen in sports familiarity for themselves (e.g., S2a-15, S6a-33). Hence, the ignorant of sports students immersed themselves in basketball, soccer, and skateboard, for instance (S1b-2, 59,60,61, S9b-42). S3a-16 revealed, " . . . Me, I sat down and looked for the history of basketball, I did not know it, so I learned about the sport", while S6a-33: " . . . okay, I watch football, not fanatically of course, I know the main rules, but now that I've looked a little further, I've learned more, and where it has started, because I did not know that." Moreover, they had a chance to transfer this knowledge to the potential audience that will watch their work (e.g., S3b-79). As S5a-32 stated " . . . to be able to give others to understand something".

The other students' efforts were positively accepted and in addition, they worked as an imitation model in the form of individual creation in areas such as: sports documentary (e.g., S1b-59, 60, 61, S2b-67), acquiring personal footage (S6b-62), the sound as a

"carpet"/background (S6b-63), the narration/voice over (S7b-85), the need for more inter-active videos (S5b-84, S4b-90), or even the comments/criticism for individual improvement (S3b-77, S5b-81). For example, the narration in combination with the image, as well as the addition of music in combination with the narration heard in parallel with the image were the ideas that were received by S1a-27 to transfer/integrate them in his own project in the future, while S4a-26 concluded: "And surely, if I do it one more time, I will think more about the narration, maybe in combination with my voice to insert music as well".

The diversity, in the students' productions, was recognized by a number (*n* = 5) of participants (e.g., S2a-12, S5b-23). In particular, it was pointed out that the music as a "carpet" in the video contributes to creating a different atmosphere, as a result, it becomes less "cold" (" . . . my video was a bit like the cold-war, without the sound", S3a-67). By this exact diversity in the video production, S2a-115, 116 stated that he comprehended "how each person . . . perceives and learns information in a better manner".

Two innovations/patents emerged during the research process. A student discovered an original idea, to turn his smartphone into a tool, using it as an auto queue device (S3a-95). Another one (S1b-64) reported that due to the difficulty of the project and due to the family conditions in her house, she made the recordings in her car, so that no sounds from the surrounding atmosphere of her house could intrude.

During the focus group interviews and the screening of the videos, the researchers asked the participants to proceed in criticizing their fellow students' productions. Positive reviews (8/19) were slightly more than the negative comments (7/19).

Regarding the positive reports, the students expressed their satisfaction (a) for the variety of the productions (S1a-78, S4a-60), (b) for the narration and especially the way in which it was expressed (S1-76, S4a-61.64), (c) for the analysis made and the explanation given on the way a sport is performed (S3a-66), and (d) for the integration of excerpts from video games that lead to better learning (S3a-69). S1b, for example, highlighted three videos (" . . . the first, if I remember correctly, was skateboarding, which really looked like an excerpt from a movie. . . . And I really liked it", S1b-59), while the videos on soccer and basketball were appreciated because " . . . it was very explanatory, and it places you completely in the concept of the sport." S1b-60,61). The participants also emphasized (e) the insertion of music that gives a different atmosphere to the video and, thus, it becomes less "cold" (S3a-67), (f) the projection of parts of victorious games that create emotions or evoke older personal experiences (S1a-75, S2a-71.72), but also (g) in the footage that was shot by the participants themselves: "I spotted Maria's video, the last one, that was about soccer and I liked that she added footage of her own, and also . . . I really liked Olympia's video . . . the sound was very clear and nice when she was talking." (S5b-62.63). Moreover, George's video was considered "complete" (S2b-67), while lastly, there was a positive reception for the instructions given by the researchers for the structure of the video such as the limited time, which led to the implementation of journalistic practices (S2a-73, S5a-81).

On the other hand, the negative reviews emphasized: (a) on the students' need to acquire their own footage (S4a-62), (b) on the importance of the interactive element of the interview and, therefore, the existence of an interviewee (S5a-80), (c) on the fact that the videos without narration were boring (S4a-63) and (d) on the misuse of music (" . . . the music was just so loud that it was almost equal to her voice level and sometimes I could not hear exactly what she was saying . . . ", S5a-79). Special mention was made (e) on the correction of the letters' font and speed of presentation as their fast pace made difficult the viewing (S9b-57) resulting in having no time for reading them (S5b-58), while in addition the white letters (two-colored) not to be distinguished (S4b-66). Finally, (f) S3b-78, identified a problem in the matching of image and narration in his own production ("I basically, while listening to the comments of my colleagues, I realized that I had a lot to correct; that is, a bit on the fonts, a bit on...").

3.2.3. Theme 3: The Lived Experience of Video Production

The third theme that arose was "The lived experience of video production". In this theme, the participants provided detailed description; also, characterizations were appointed to the whole process, while in conclusion, the benefits derived were referred to.

The vast majority of the students (14/19) considered the video production an interesting and creative experience and welcomed it warmly, portraying it as "interesting" (S3a-19), "positive/good enough" (6/19, e.g., S1a-3, S8b-38), "very nice" (S2a-13), "unprecedented" (S2b-8), "creative" (S1b-7), or "useful" (S6b-106). In fact, two of the students (S2a, S7a) stated that there was an involvement of their previous experience in sports in the video production. The first one (S2a-72) recalled his experiences, while the second (S7a-39) managed to transfer them to the production, as he has been professionally involved in the sport of volleyball in the past. " . . . I used to play volleyball in the past and due to an injury, I left it abruptly, so I needed to get back to it again, so . . . " he said characteristically.

The process of creating the videos was indicated as creative and original, with most (16/19) of the involved students specifying that they were satisfied with the process, especially S4-60 and S9-49 expressed immense enthusiasm. It was a good procedure that was "liked" (8/19, e.g., S2a-7,11,15, S10b-44, 44), was found "interesting" and "creative" (5/19, e.g., S5a-28, 29,32, S9b-40), described as "original" (5/19, e.g., S6b-107, S7b-113) and "easy" for S2b-75, while on the contrary "complicated and time consuming" for S8b-35,55. S1a-2, "congratulated" his fellow students, (" . . . basically I want to applause all the students who made videos, . . . well done to all"), while some of the participants (4/19, e.g., S9a-49, S7b-28), expressed their satisfaction for the production of the video as a students' work within the obligations of the course, with sports content.

Training in new practices and skills acquisition were acknowledged as essential components of the endeavor. Even though some of the students (4/19) said that they initially thought of the process as an obstacle and decided that if during the implementation they would find it difficult, then they would not complete the production (e.g., S3a-119, S4a-134), in the end, most of them were satisfied by the procedure (12/19, e.g., S8a-141, S4b18, 70,98,99, S10b-45, 47, 117). Overall, the students declared that they gained experience and they acquired or improved digital skills (8/19, e.g., S1b-92,93, S3b-97, S10b-117), furthermore, they applied or practiced journalistic or technical methods (5/19). As the research took place during the COVID-19 lockdown, some of the students expressed the need to perform their own video shootings (e.g., S7b-129, S10b-47) in order to make the production more interactive (S4b-70), while one of them (S8b-105) criticized himself " . . . I spotted some mistakes in mine and generally now I know how to avoid them in the next video . . . ".

3.2.4. Theme 4: The Scoring Bonus Fundamental/Basic Motivation

The fourth theme that emerged from the study was "The grading bonus as fundamental/key motivation" to produce the video. The students explained what their main motivation was and the reasons for it; also, which were the other motivations to participate in the study and answered if they would give up the grading motivation.

For most of the students (11/19), the scoring bonus was a fundamental/key motivation to proceed with the video production process (e.g., S2a-127, S5a-130,132, S6b-205, S8b-208), or an "extra motivation" (S4b-200), or simply, some kind of (small) motivation (S2b-125). "For better or worse for me it was a motivation and... it pushed me, I knew I would do the job," said S1a-125. In any case, S4b-201 stressed that it was "a reward" for all students. However, one student (S3a-118,121) had completely forgotten that there was a bonus. Finally, for S6a-137, the existence of the bonus did not play any role, while S7a-143,144,145 did not even know that there was a grading motivation, as he did not attend the course, nevertheless, he was happy to learn of its existence.

The researchers realizing the importance of grading motivation, and in combination with the students' answers regarding the enjoyment of the process and the experience obtained, while gaining additional knowledge, wanted to know whether the participants would be willing to give up the grading bonuses. This was not foreseen in the design

of the survey, nor was it in the semi-structured guide for the focus group interviews. However, qualitative research gives this flexibility to the research process; it is one of the key advantages it offers, and it has been applied here [34,67]. About half of the students (9/19, e.g., S8a-160, S2b-198, S7b-207) said they wanted the bonus grade and asked for the researchers' initial promise to be fulfilled, with one student not answering, pretending that he lost his connection, when something like this did not really happen: ("I lose my connection, I have no signal!!", S3a-154). Five students (e.g., S6a-157, S2b-198) were absolute that they would not give up the bonus grade, " . . . I would like to keep the bonus . . . because I already worked on it, so I deserve it," said S1a-148, 151. Three others (S4a, S7a, S2a) asked for at least some part of the bonus grade. On the other hand, five students (e.g., S1b-193, S5b-203, S10b-212) stated that they would accept to waive the grading bonus, another three they would not necessarily want it (e.g., S9b-211) and one student stated that he did not care if the bonus was deducted from his final grade, however, he did not urge his removal ("Okay, I would not say give up . . . ", S5a-155,156). The reasons for the denial of the bonus were various. S10b-213 in this process came closer to the world of sports journalism.

Sub-theme 4(a): The individual motivations

For the vast majority of students (17/19, e.g., S3aS8a, S1b S10b), in addition to the bonus grading, there were individual, different types of motivations for each of them in order to proceed with the video production process, some of which were common among them.

For some of the students, like S3b-217 and S5b-220, the motivation was simply to create or become creative within the prohibitions of COVID 19, (" . . . when it was announced, I said to myself we will do something, I was sitting all day . . . " said S7a-38). Moreover, the motivation was the whole production concept (e.g., S6b-223), which was described as "constructive" (S5b-202), especially with the editing process "but to be done entirely by me and not collaboratively" as S1b-215 said. Other students' motivation was to acquire skills useful for the future (S7b-227), or to practice (S9a-147) in the implementation of technical and journalistic practices (S6b-109). For example, (S6b-109) said: "you made us say the most important things, according to our judgment, in two minutes, . . . it taught us to work in a limited time and not to give extra information.". For others, the motivation was to introduce an unknown sport such as American football (S3a) or unpopular sports such as wheelchair basketball (S2b-216), or the regulations of a sport (S4b-199). Others were given the opportunity to create freely, express themselves or to produce original content (S10b-120). For example, as S3a-84 stated, " . . . it is nice to have someone take you by the hand and present you unfamiliar sports, . . . such as cricket, badminton, or curling." The presentation of the knowledge gaining knowledge, the transition from theory to practice as well as the interviewee approach also motivated the participants. For two students were given the opportunity to relive the experience of their sport (" . . . I remembered my sport again . . . ", S2a-128), with S5a-131 being active again in sports venues by interviewing an athlete, while for two students was the way in which the researchers asked for their participation in the study: "You asked us so politely and... I wanted very much to help you, because I saw how warmly you wanted to do this research and I could not but do it", stated S2a-129.

3.2.5. Theme 5: The Difficulty in Using Video Editing Software and Further Production Issues

The fifth theme that emerged from the thematic analysis of the data from the two focus groups interviews, was "The difficulty in using video editing software and further production issues". Furthermore, a sub-theme entitled "Problems in the video production process" emerged as well. In this case, the participants described the various video editing software they used, the difficulties encountered in the technical and in the journalistic part of the production, and finally their causes, their previous experience was spotted as an ease factor in the whole process.

The majority of the students were referred to the software they used to produce the requested video (13/19). While seven out of 10 students of the second focus group (e.g., S1b-5, 6, 65, S10b-46) declared that they had previous expertise, three out of nine of the first focus group stated lack of familiarity (e.g., S4a-20). This fact made them hesitant at the beginning of the work (S2a-14). They revealed that they asked for help in this regard, from the first researcher (S8b-50), or they searched for other software on their own (S1a-27).

The prior experience on video production, either in the context of another course in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications, or coming as a hobby, led several students (5/19) (e.g., S1a-99, S8a-54) to easily produce the video. "I have done it in the past, always completely amateurishly, mainly for YouTube, because I am mad with editing. Out of school. This is the first time I am doing something for this School," said S7a-55.

Sub-theme 5(a): Problems encountered in the video production process

Most of the students (17/19) pointed out the various kinds of encountered difficulties during the production of the video. They stated that they generally faced problems either (a) in terms of the technical part, or (b) in the part of journalistic practice. The causes of the difficulties that arose were due to (a) the limitations of COVID-19 pandemic that did not allow them to shoot their own footage (i.e., S4b-69, S5b-82, 83) and (b) the lack of time that would relieve them of production stress or give them the opportunity for deepening (2/10, S2b-74, S6b-27).

Regarding the technical part, for five out of nine students, it was a time consuming and detailed process (i.e., S8a-45), which was affected either by the use of bad equipment ("If you have a good computer, good job will come out, if you have a laptop or something inferior you may come up with something you do not like so much"), or by the lack of prior familiarity to the employment of a digital video editing software (4/10, i.e., S6a-34), or by the restrictions on free software, as identified by a student with prior experience. For example, S3a-93,94,96 found it difficult to record his narration since the computer did not allow him to do so, therefore, he used his smartphone as an auto-queue device. However, there was still the problem of the limited dimensions of the screen. Furthermore, S8a-47 and S6a-48 had to confront the difficulties due to the software watermarks that remained on the video, while an obstacle for S8 b-36 was the synchronization of the image with the narration. Other difficulties, at the beginning of production, which were reported by four out of 10 students were, for example, the stability or the speed of the internet connection (i.e., S7b-33, S9b-43) or various other reasons.

Regarding the journalistic part of the production, two students stated that they had difficulty in this process, due to lack of previous training in this field. For example, S1a-77, 85, 86 had difficulties in the narration to maintain the audience's attention, while S2a in the adaptation to the limited time that was given (2′). The above conclude that besides the issue of little or no technical training, there was also a deficit in the acquisition of journalistic skills during the study.

The inclusion of students in their home (lockdown) due to the COVID-19 pandemic, led to restrictions on the video production for four out of 10 students (i.e., S1b-71, 72, S2b-73, S5b-82, 83). For example, they were not allowed to go out and perform their own shoots (i.e., S4b-69) and, therefore, instead of using raw material, they were forced to use material found on the Internet, as S1b-71. At the discretion of the students after watching the videos, this fact significantly reduced the interactivity of the video content (S5b-82).

3.2.6. Theme 6: The Powerful Image and the Storytelling

The sixth topic that emerged from the data analysis and was identified as a recur-ring pattern in the focus group interviews and as a dominant element of the video production was "The powerful image and the storytelling". The research participants identified three main elements and explained the reasons they concluded to them. The combination of the (powerful) image with the parallel narration (storytelling) is for many of them (11/19, e.g., S5a-164, S4b-89,90 S6b-86, S10b-87) the most dominant element in video production. The main reason expressed was the fact that this combination " . . . works very well" (S3-162),

while the appropriate tone in the voice of the narration keeps the viewer's attention (S1a-165), with S1b-88 also agreeing: "The combination of the image with the sound . . . and one sees what he sees and hears it, so through these two senses he is there, the attention does not leave." Furthermore, the music that "dresses" the image with the other elements, is another choice of some of students (4/11 e.g., S4-168, S3b-80), since the music makes the video " . . . a little more interesting and livelier." (S1a-165). "Transitions that go from one slide to the other in a creative way, either when the letters come in suddenly or when they disappear, are very nice," explained S7b-85. Finally, combining the image with (written) text is the next option, if "they are combined properly and alternate harmoniously" (S4-163) and in fact regardless of the existence of narration (S6-166) as in this way " . . . you see and you understand" (S2-168).

3.2.7. Theme 7: YouTube as the Preferred Platform

The seventh topic that emerged from the study was "YouTube as the preferred platform". The students revealed their preferred social media where they would post/upload their work and explained the reasons why they would do so, or not.

Most of the students (13/19), mainly from the second focus group interviews (e.g., S2a-174, S4b-147, S10b-148), would exclusively choose YouTube to upload the video that was produced in the context of the present research if this was a prerequisite for the study. The main reasons stated were that " . . . on YouTube it would last for a longer time . . . " (S3a-172), it has a great impact (S2b-136) and has " . . . a channel dedicated specifically to sports . . . " (S1b-134); another reason is because it accepts large files (S6b-133).

Instagram and Facebook were also mentioned, and the reasons stated regarding Instagram were its ability to reach a wide audience, "because this medium is . . . quite popular . . . " (S4b-147), therefore, it has a great impact (S2a-174), it is followed by " . . . most of the people, especially young people.", (S1a-179) and it suits the work they produced (S5a-176) and also " . . . now, it is more popular than Facebook . . . " (S6a-180). In another aspect, Facebook was selected since it " . . . has a greater impact on people we know who would see it . . . ", (S3a-172), also there is a more targeted audience, with groups interested in sports (" . . . in a specific group in Facebook, so that I know the audience that will see it is interested in sports." S7a-189).

Posting on a Website was an option for four out of 10 students, all participating in the second focus group. Their argument for posting " . . . on a sports page" (S5b-143) was that they fit better because they are only involved in sports (S1b-134), or because they specialize in specific sports (S7b-131 S3b-140).

Finally, in addition to the initial post, students would attempt to promote their work, in combination with other already mentioned social networks (S8a-182, S8b-144, S10b-148, one via LinkedIn (S4a-185), one via the official channel of Sports Federation on YouTube ("Maybe on the official channel of the wheelchair basketball federation", S2b-138), while another, for this reason, would choose Twitter (S9b-127).

However, none of the student will eventually upload this project to any medium. The reasons given by 12 out of 19 students are that they would like to upload a more improved or more detailed version of it (e.g., S5a-177, S2b-137), since they do not consider the current production as appropriate (" . . . I consider it very amateurish for me" S7a-188). In its current form, it would only be uploaded by S1b-135, if he had its own website: "Or if I had such a YouTube channel or such a website . . . .".

4. Discussion

This study aimed at recording the perspectives of the students that attend the Sports Journalism course in the School of Journalism at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece on an educational procedure that involved the creation of a short digital storytelling production. Following the production, and in the framework of receiving answers to the four research questions set by the authors, the participants were asked to state their opinion on the endeavor under the principles of an embedded mixed research (QUAN and QUAL).

The results obtained from the dual analysis of the quantitative findings and the accounts presented to the authors by the students in their interviews through their experience in video production, gave important answers and led to significant conclusions.

The main finding regarding the educational procedure derived from the focus group interviews was that the teaching methodology employed during the Sports Journalism course was modern and interactive and easy to follow while offering many advantages. Even a student with attention deficit disorder stated that he could follow the procedure along with his classmates, making this form of teaching more approachable to different kinds of students. The participants' need to be creative and interact with the professors was mentioned many times as well as their need to participate in peer reviewing processes and receive feedback for their endeavors. They believe they acquired more knowledge in the major, while simultaneously they cultivated skills and promoted their expertise in journalistic practice through an out of the ordinary process for them.

Considering the results of the dual research, the answer to RQ1, (Which are the journalistic skills that are considered as most important by undergraduate students of sports journalism module?) is derived from the quantitative analysis, where is indicated that the ability to be a good writer is a highly ranked feature by the participants in this study, which is also referred equally important in other studies conducted among professionals [18,30,68]. However, the data signify technical skills as not considered equally important, although in relative research among journalists working in TV stations, traditional broadcasting abilities, such as on-air ability and video, these skills were ranked significantly higher [18]. Therefore, there seems to be a lack of information regarding the competencies required, which is presented even further when the students, although they want to work in television, they do not consider audiovisual skills and on-air ability as absolutely important skills. In the convergent news environment, all dexterities are equally important, and students should become better news consumers to critically comprehend the vocation demands. Through their answers in the focus group interviews, the importance of technical skill acquisition is highly indicated, therefore, the authors suppose that maybe those who were not engaged in the video production lacked the experience that could drive them to other kinds of answers through their personal involvement. The significance of filling the gap between the theory and the job requirements was further mentioned in the interviews: " . . . it has largely covered the gap between theory and practice that exists in several school subjects" were the words of S3b.

Regarding RQ2, (How is an innovative pedagogical procedure, which involves the concept, research, and deployment of a digital storytelling production, evaluated by the students of sports journalism module?) most of the students were satisfied, since an "interesting", "useful", and "creative" work was assigned to them. It was concluded that this project enhanced their motivation as they blended their ideas, expressions, and technological skills in the learning process as other similar studies pointed out [69–71], which is a significant pedagogical benefit. Although some mentioned that it was time consuming, finally the result pleased them. They acknowledged the training in new practices and skills, both technical and journalistic, through an "original" procedure that was welcomed mainly by the outcome, as it was something unprecedented in the educational process. The authors' initial planning, which was based in designing a project that could provide new opportunities for cross-disciplinary, modern approaches to practice-based scholarship and pedagogy, as Barber [72] (p. 2) suggests, was proved successful, as evaluated by the participants. The stories created were based on self-expression, since the students were not given strict instructions on how to make the production, allowing them to engage themselves creatively and autonomously in the learning environment [69]. The significance of the elements used was also self-evaluated. In some of the cases, the narratives reflected features of their own lived experience as athletes, " . . . I used to play volleyball in the past . . . so I needed to get back to it again, so . . . " said S7a-39 characteristically, thus framing the production under a personal view, which delivered more coherent results. As the quantitative findings revealed that 71.1% of the participants were involved in sports, it

was an opportunity to practice and extend their skills within a subject that interests them. In that way, the assets would be earned smoother and even more complex work could be employed on the production of original content. The authors agree with Barber [72] (p. 10) that, *"practice is more productive than theory"*. Furthermore, the researchers' aim, expressed politely, was to make the students understand that every story matters and that all of them would be appreciated, and this approach was cultivated to them and was even commented on in the focus group interviews.

The answer to the third research question (RQ3: How is the lived experience of a digital storytelling production perceived by the students of sports journalism module and which aspects does it detect? Is the element of bonus grading involved in that perception?) was positively oriented since the endeavor was perceived as an opportunity to acquire knowledge; even the students ignorant of sports thought it was a convenient circumstance to immerse themselves in the field. Furthermore, they stated that through the production, they had the chance to show to the rest what they had learned; their ability to present the knowledge acquired along with their creation was a challenge for them and a great opportunity to come out in the open. Therefore, through a process of narrating and sharing information, the students were immersed in a new learning environment based on practice and creativity. Furthermore, they developed their communication skills through organizing their ideas, interviewing, and expressing their obtained [73]. The diversity in their productions, since they had no guidelines in the way they could be expressed, was received warmly and it was intriguing for them to watch a production on the same sport delivered through different perspectives. For example, S10a-120 stated that although he does not take up optional work in other courses, but in this one, also optional, " . . . it was something original . . . and I wanted to see if I could respond to it . . . ".

It was mentioned that they comprehended better the content through the videos. We have to keep in mind that they belong to the Generation Z whose members are accustomed to learning through audiovisual stimuli. Moreover, in order to reach successfully to the end of their task, they become resourceful in overcoming the problems encountered. Furthermore, since all the productions were presented to all of the students, they had the opportunity to peer-review the work of their classmates and realize their mistakes, thus gaining beneficial knowledge in commentating their own and other students' work, which as Rubin [73] (p. 19) states, *"can promote gains in emotional intelligence, collaboration and social learning"*. As they stated, through a self-awareness point of view, this procedure will help them correct the wrongdoings the next time they will be asked to make another production The authors agree with Hessler and Lambert [74] that through this process, the participants will become more empathetic, attentive, and collaborative learners. They realized the distinct role of each of the elements used (video, narration, texts, music, etc.) to the creation of the overall impression, which was mentioned in the positive and negative comments. Following this procedure they realized, sometimes the hard way, the role of the multimodality of the compositional parts and the creative choices they had to make to deliver their aspect. Although there was a proposal by the researchers to grant bonus grading for those who participated in the project, there were students that were willing to give it up as they were compensated by the procedure itself and the benefits acquired (e.g., S1b-193). This fact was extremely significant since it constitutes the outcome of a successful educational procedure. When the benefits are perceived by the students and they are gained through a creative and constructive process outside the basic provision of teaching, this results in the essence of education, which is receiving knowledge regardless of grades. However, others (e.g., S8a-160) realized their hard work and asked for the bonus grading, which was the initial thought of the authors as well, that hard work should be rewarded.

Regarding RQ4, (Through the lived experience of the digital storytelling production and having probably confronted encountered problems, which audiovisual features are evaluated as significant by the students-creators for the comprehension of story?), the participants identified the role of storytelling, as images combined with the proper narration, the most dominant element in the production. Moreover, the appropriate tone of the voice

was acknowledged as very important since in that way, the audience could delve into the story. The selection of music was also described as an important feature that would make a point in the overall impact of the production. Other components mentioned were the transitions between the video parts and the insertion of explanatory texts. Journalists, nowadays, operate between technology and society, thus, they must know how to work with tools that will reach their audience in the best possible way. Additionally, they realized that they must adapt the content to consume it through the networks, either platforms such as YouTube or social media and they were strict on their productions. They comprehend that interaction with the audience is very important and the concept of belonging to a community, as in social media, may assist in the promotion of their products; however, they recognize that the quality matters " . . . a video that I would feel confident and I would like people to see, I would upload it," said S1a-178. Therefore, it can be assumed that the students after realizing the use of the various tools employed as expressive means they improved their digital competence regardless of their prior knowledge as other studies also suggest [75].

Under the prism of this research and since in the contemporary media landscape, news consumers seek for content in many different sources and forms, and they do not rely on specific media providers, the authors conclude that modern educational procedures must be explored and applied. Through the interaction with the students during the research, from the discussions that followed, the emails that were exchanged and from the focus group interviews, they mutually realized that: the trainee journalists found the project interesting, motivating, they acted individually and proceeded with the production of the video with satisfaction. It was indicated to the researchers that the participants had either acquired or developed existing skills (e.g., audio and video editing, writing and storytelling), they applied journalistic practices (e.g., primary research, source verification, use of the appropriate material from the Internet) and worked in newsroom conditions with time constraints. In moments of inspiration and creativity, they were involved in non-popular sports (S1b-2), sports for the disabled, women's sports, relatively unpopular sports for the Greek audience and were adaptive to the situations as they turned their car into a studio, the smart phone into an auto queue device (S3a-95), or capturing themselves through the computer cameras. The students seem to seek the practice and the field approach to cover the divide that often exists between theory and workplace reality. The researchers concluded that the hybrid teaching attempt was enthusiastically accepted by students, was described as "innovative" (S1b-152), and was proposed as a form of educational practice in other modules as well. Therefore, through this novel pedagogical research project, they confirmed their perception regarding the need of transforming teaching methodologies to reach the newer generations and engage the students creatively in the learning process. Digital literacy acquisition can be achieved via enjoyable learning activities through experience and practice that at the end provide enhanced learning despite any difficulties encountered. In this aspect, digital storytelling was proved a valuable educational tool, that encompassed digital media literacy with expression of creativity and promoted students' engagement in the module.

In this era of mobile-centric multimedia platforms, individual productions may be easily accessed outside the framework of official news organizations, and recognition may be achieved easier than at any other era. Thus, effective audiovisual storytelling techniques combined, of course, with all the criteria set for proper journalism, such as investigation, critical thinking, analysis, unbiased reporting, credibility, good writing skills, and more, will provide high quality news to the audience. The future sports journalists may acquire all the elements through higher education curricula that allow the students to associate them all together under the prism of their own creativity and expression and create a personal brand. The expansion of audiovisual news content inevitably leads to the adaptation of the knowledge and skills delivered through university courses, especially, since the news industry demands employees with diverse expertise when communicating the stories.

When all the technical knowledge is acquired, then emergent journalists will be able to develop the full range of their means of expression.

5. Conclusions

There is an on-going demand on researching leading educational procedures and practices as generations evolve and new challenges arise. The externalization of students' thoughts through projects that are based on personal expression can create reasons for reflection since the produced outcome is apparent [2]. Furthermore, as new devices and forms of consuming news emerge the reception of content changes, thus future journalists must be trained to accomplish their work in the new environments by adapting their competences to them. The value of the education is apparent when issues are dealt before the students become professionals. Since it is not easy for an educator to teach a specialized course and at the same time evaluate skills that are beyond his/her scientific field, collaborations in an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach among colleagues could bring the finest results [31]. Furthermore, it is in the authors' belief that implanting in the students the willingness to constantly learn and evolve themselves is a major accomplishment. The participants ranked highly the "life-learning" willingness on innovative systems in journalism, which depicts their perspective and that will ensure long-term success.

In other respects, sharing the stories in the common presentation day, created an understanding environment among the students who were happy to hear the comments of their colleagues and gain mutual respect. The authors' deemed it appropriate to focus on that part of the educational procedure since it strengthened the students' self-esteem. The teachers' insight should be connected with the students' needs [76].

One of the study's limitations is the small number of participants, which could not be overcome since there is no other Sports Journalism course in Greek universities. Of course, there are public and mainly private vocational schools, lower level than higher education, that operate under other kinds of structures, and which are not based on the principles of the academic teaching of a higher institution but rather solely depended on professionals of the field. As a part of future research, it would be interesting to follow those students as they turn to professionals and ask their opinion under their new circumstances in relation to the job positions and roles they hold. In another field, audience research regarding their preferred presentation forms of sports news would bring new data on the educational process by identifying the customers' needs in conjunction with the journalists' capacity to interact with their audience.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study, since all participants were adults that provided informed consent prior to their participation in the research.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data are available upon request to the authors.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

The questionnaire employed in the quantitative survey of the current study.

Digital Storytelling in Sports Journalism

The following questionnaire has been created in the research context on the relationship between digital storytelling and sports journalism. It is anonymous and will be used exclusively for academic purposes.

1. How would you describe the usability of research as a skill in the journalism profession? (1—-absolutely important, 5—-not at all important)
2. How would you describe the usability of good writing skills as a skill in the journalism profession? (1—-absolutely important, 5 —-not at all important)
3. How would you describe the usability of interview conduct knowledge as a skill in the journalism profession? (1—-absolutely important, 5—-not at all important)
4. How would you describe the usability of critical thinking as a skill in the journalism profession? (1—-absolutely important, 5—- not at all important)
5. How would you describe the usability of general computer knowledge as a skill in the journalism profession? (1—-absolutely important, 5—-not at all important)
6. How would you describe the usability of multimedia knowledge as a skill in the journalism profession? (1—-absolutely important, 5—-not at all important)
7. How would you describe the usability of audiovisual equipment handling knowledge as a skill in the journalism profession? (1—-absolutely important, 5—-not at all important)
8. How would you describe the usability of audiovisual production editing knowledge as a skill in the journalism profession? (1—-absolutely important, 5—-not at all important)
9. How would you describe the usability of knowledge on news transfer (via websites and social media) as a skill in the journalism profession? (1—-absolutely important, 5—-not at all important)
10. How would you describe the usability of on-air ability as a skill in the journalism profession? (1—-absolutely important, 5—-not at all important)
11. How would you describe the usability of adaptability on innovative forms of news editing and transfer due to technological parameters as a skill in the journalism profession? (1—-absolutely important, 5—-not at all important)
12. How would you describe the usability of life-learning willingness on innovative systems as a skill in the journalism profession? (1—-absolutely important, 5—-not at all important)
13. Would you like to work as a sports journalist? (1—-Yes, 2—-No, 3—-I have not decided yet)
14. If yes, in which medium would you prefer to work? (The participants were asked to evaluate in a 5-point Likert scale, 1—-Very much, 5—-Not at all, for the following media: 1—-Newspaper, 2—-TV, 3—-Radio, and 4—-Website)
15. Have you been an athlete? (1—-Yes, 2—-No)
16. If yes, in which sport? (open-ended)
17. If yes, at what level? (1—-Amateur, 2—-Professional)
18. Did you attend modules on audiovisual equipment handling (use of camera and microphone)? (1—-Yes, 2—-No)
19. Have you used audiovisual equipment, i.e., a camera, even of a mobile phone, not for personal use, but in a professional context or for the purposes of a course (before your participation in the specific project)? (1—-Yes, 2—-No)
20. Have you created a video production so far, not for personal use, but in a professional context or for the purposes of a course (before your participation in this project)? (1—-Yes, 2—-No)
21. How often do you watch videos with sports content? (1—-Every day, 5—-Less than 1 time/fortnight)

22. In which medium do you watch videos with sports content? (The participants were asked to state in a 5-point Likert scale, 1—-Every day, 5—-Less than 1 time/fortnight, forthe following choices: 1—-Free TV channels during their broadcast (e.g., ERT, Open, Star, etc.), 2—-Free TV channels via their websites (e.g., ERT, Open, Star, etc.), 3—-Satellite TV channels, 4—-YouTube, 5—-Websites with sports content, and 6—-Paid TV channels via streaming broadcast (e.g., NOVAgo, COSMOTE TV, etc.)

23. Do you watch online the channel of a Greek team (of any sport)? (The participants were asked to state on a 5-point Likert scale, 1—-Every day, 5—-Less than 1 time/fortnight, for—the following choices: 1—-Via the team's website, 2—-Via YouTube)

24. Why did you enroll to the module of sports journalism? (open-ended)

25. Gender (1—-Male, 2—-Female, and 3—-I prefer not to say)

26. Did you create an audiovisual production in the framework of the research project? (1—-Yes, 2—-No)

The following questions are addressed to those having created an audiovisual production

1. Did you shoot your own footage? (1—-Yes, 2—-No)

2. Which device did you use to acquire your own footage? (open-ended)

3. Did you use footage from the web? (1—-Yes, 2—-No)

4. You edited your video on (1—-PC or laptop, 2—-Mobile phone, and 3—-Other)

5. Which editing software did you use? (open-ended)

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