# Practicing Application of the Game Model in Elaboration of Students Journalists' Soft Skills

Irina I. Volkova
Department of Mass Communication
RUDN–University
Moscow, Russian Federation
-e-mail address if desired

Svetlana L. Urazova
Academic journal "Vestnik VGIK"
Russian State University of Cinematography
Moscow, Russian Federation
svetlana.urazova@gmail.com

Lydia K. Lobodenko
Institute of Media, Social Sciences and Humanities
line 2-name of organization, acronyms acceptable
Chelyabinsk, Russian Federation

Leila O. Algavi
Department of Theory and History of Journalism
RUDN–University
Moscow, Russian Federation

Vishal Sharma
Department of Mass Communication
RUDN–University
Moscow, Russian Federation

*Abstract* — **The article describes the particular case of a game model application for the soft skills' training of the students journalists. That led to the mixed results that were conceptualized after the experiment that was carried out in the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia during the preparation and holding of the Student's television film festival as part of the bachelor's training course "Creative Team Management". The authors put an increased focus on the development of a communicative-cognitive environment for elaborating soft skills in the form of games. The article presents the results of the integration of the D. Kolb's Experiential Learning method (an empiric basis) and the Pearson-Marr Archetype Indicator (a theoretical basis). This approach to learning let to solve several problems as theoretical, creative and practical. This study contributes to the development of an interdisciplinary model of "Four-Dimensional Education" (knowledge, skills, character, and meta-training), where a future professional would obtain not only theoretical knowledge and skills to predict the further developments in their field of expertise, and the proficiencies to use of constantly changing and expanding technologies for distant communication, but also a large spectrum of the personal qualities, axiological values aimed at positive behavior and engagement in the world. The results presented in the article would be helpful for the teachers in the tuition of future professionals in the various field of media studies.**

*Keywords* — *learning methods; gamification; soft skills; student motivation; television festival.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The industrial revolution gave rise to the development of media communications which enabled any individual to become a subject-object "element" of the global world, thereby posing problems for a safe and environmentally friendly media space, and education inevitably entered a new phase of development associated with widespread media literacy. On the one hand, the issue of the establishing mass media education structures was urgent as a response to the society's request for acquirement of the theoretical and practical skills in the field of interpersonal and mass communications, as well as in the field of media culture which is a part of national one and defined as a "special type of people's communication" [1]. On the other hand, the responsibility of professional journalists and other experts in the field of mass communications to the society has considerably increased, thus establishing special requirements now imposed on their training system.

Establishing of information consciousness [2], the social actors' need for development of divergent thinking (creative thinking when searching for many solutions to one problem) based on creativity - all this is reflected in widely disseminated information culture built on eventivity and dialogue culture (speech, verbal, visual, screen, existential, virtual communications). It is the journalists who are called to become the medium of this information culture, who build up their activities on its components and formulate basic postulates in the media space.

A university professor must have a set of encyclopedic knowledge, be smart enough, be able to synthesize interdisciplinary knowledge, accumulate and transform renewed technological capabilities into skills and also have a high level of axiological priorities and the desire for success in fulfilling a professional mission to form the worldview modes of a future media specialist. A university professor should also be able to design and adapt these standards to their training course within confidential communication teacher-student

relationship, and be original in representing this educational material.

To solve the problems of a new type of training, we upgraded the training course "Creative Team Management" functioning at the RUDN university (bachelor degree in TV Journalism, 2nd year): the course (2018-2019 academic year) implied gamification methods to develop "soft skills" among student journalists, and implemented a media project - a television festival (it's slogan is "The Television We Lost") as a result of the course. This was the second stage of the educational experiment, which started at the Philology Department of the RUDN University as part of the "TV Journalism" course (bachelor's degree in Journalism, 3d year) in 2017-2018. The results of the first stage were summarized and established scientific rationale in the post-graduate dissertation "Transformation of Professional Competences of the Journalist in the Period of Media Digitalization" (by E.S. Kilpelyaynen, scientific adviser is Volkova I.I.) [3].

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The value of mastering and methods of applying "soft skills" among modern specialists was referred to in a number of program documents of the World Economic Forum in Davos (2016), which drew special attention to issues of education and personal development.

It was noted that in the nearest future routine operations will be automated, human work will be reduced to the following abilities:

- to solve complex problems;
- to think critically;
- to think creatively;
- to manage people;
- to work in a team;
- to recognize emotions and manage them;
- to form judgements and make decisions;
- to focus on a customer; to negotiate;
- to switch quickly from one problem to another (World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, 2016).

The development of these skills is focused both on interaction with people and on the development of one's own proactivity. These soft skills are reduced to an application scheme of four basic (4C) ones: critical thinking (cause-effect relationships tracking, orientation in volume of information, a propensity to analyze and produce conclusions), creativity (quick orientation in changing circumstances, willingness to see a problem from different parties, decisiveness in making non-standard decisions, generation of ideas), communication (willingness to negotiate, make contacts, hear the interlocutor without losing one's self), coordination (professional full cooperation, the ability to find a common goal and ways to achieve it, understanding of the roles in the group). Bearers of these competencies cannot be replaced with robotic technical algorithms.

There is no concept of soft skills development in the system of national school education, but there are university projects, for example, "4C of the Modern World: Building Up Competences of the 21st Century and Assessing Individual Progress in Their Development" (Center for Psychometrics and Measurements in Education, HSE).

Specialists possessing 4C skills are especially in demand in the constantly transforming sphere of journalism and media communications. The problem is that the most successful influencers among bloggers, as a rule, are not professionals, they are not aware of the information culture and axiological restrictions. At the same time, they have a full set of 4C skills. It turns out a conundrum - higher media education, giving priority to hard skills does not guarantee success in the struggle for the audience in the media space (a subsystem of the information and communication universe), and the impact of the applied aspect in the development of meanings is reduced. "The issue of meanings development associated with the content-richness of historical time, wrapped in popular media forms has been the primal problem of the media and society interaction, both in the predigital era and the digital one" [4]. This aspect sets an urgent need of mastering soft skills in reference to would-be journalists in the framework of general professional disciplines.

In this regard, one of the ways of solving the problem of hard skills and soft skills joint development in higher education is the following. An experimental educational project is being carried out, which results in a real media product created by a team of students: a professor builds up a motivating communicative and cognitive environment for teaching soft skills through experience and on the basis of theoretical material, which is the aim of the course, and the elements of gamification. The results of the previously carried out survey determine the students' archetype.

The most suitable basis of the experimental model for the educational project was David Kolb's experiential learning style theory which is typically represented by a four-stage learning cycle: observation plus analysis (assessment of what is happening), abstract conceptualization (modification of an existing abstract concept), active experimentation (experience testing, planning), concrete experience (obtaining specific experience) (Experimental Learning Theory, ELT) [5; 6]. The model is a cycle, so it is possible to enter the cycle at any stage, however, when training soft skills, the learning process is better to start with concrete experience stage, as it is the basis for observation and reflection. D. Kolb's training model is universal for training soft skills, adaptive and does not depend on the theoretical material of the course. On the basis of the management theory and the psychology of managing a creative person (in accordance with the topic of the studied discipline) the professor forms a comfortable cognitive communicative environment. The fact that students of Media Studies Department, as a rule, are communicatively tolerant and have a higher level of empathy compared to students of other specialties facilitates the task [7]. However, television people, as representatives of Generation Z, reveal alterocentric features in communication and are wary of communication participants. One of the reasons is their bid for online contacts and limitation of real communications.

## III. Purpose Of The Study

The aim of the experimental educational project is to study opportunities of gamification methods and cognitive environment models [8] for soft skills development [9; 10] in reference to would-be television journalists and television producers within "Creative Team Management" course with preliminary testing of the methodology for assigning students certain roles in the group. The experiment fulfilled several tasks set at the first stage. The educational and methodical complex "Creative Team Management" was reconsidered and modified to turn students to soft skills training. The theoretical and practical objectives corresponding to professional skills of a media specialist (hard skills) were preserved. Among the fulfilled tasks we indicate the following in the original wording: to give a series of practicals on the "Creative Team Management" course; to introduce gamification to motivate students and involve in mastering the course; to develop a student performance evaluation system similar to computer games; to involve students' parents in a television project development; to identify the effectiveness of the Carol Pearson's questionnaire (archetypes) [11] for assigning roles to students; to conduct in-depth interviews with students at the end of the course, as well as to collect anonymous feedback on the given practicals.

## IV. Materials and methods

During the educational experiment, the professors were involved in the overt observation of the preparation and organization of the final media event - Student Television Film Festival. The project model was based on three foundations - determining the roles of participants through preliminary testing, a non-linear elective model of the educational process, and the final event with the stakeholders.

The theoretical and methodological approach to the gamification of the educational project involves introduction of some game elements to the educational process:

- progress tracking (points, levels, statuses);

- use of narrative;

- fixing of the project participants actions;

- online feedback;

- joint problem solving;

- the ability to change the role of the participant;

- development of the skill and complication of tasks;

- generation of new social bonds.

Not all elements can be used in a gamified educational project, thus the authors of the experiment at RUDN University applied only progress indicators and a narrative history. According to the gamification theorists [12], the selected elements encouraging a student to act in one way or another must be based on a game model that excludes manipulation.

Although the debate about the viability of the educational process gamification proceeds in the scientific community, obvious advantages of gamification are not questioned [13; 14; 15]: an opportunity for students to influence the course of their studies; developing of a wide range of skills through the game in different roles; freedom of making mistakes; the visible essence of learning and progress; revealing and using of new types of motivation. A nonlinear elective model of the educational process (according to D. Kolb's model) was gamified in the project implemented at RUDN University. Students were divided into three functional groups - creators, managers and PR managers. They all worked for a common goal - to prepare and hold a television festival. The leaders of each group were appointed according to the test results. An online achievement board was used as a progress indicator, where points of each group were registered and accumulated according to a special algorithm. The narrative history was a life story of S.A. Muratov, a television reviewer, a screenwriter, a professor of Moscow State University. He was one of the authors of the popular television game KVN (Club of the Funny and Inventive). The dramatic collision was that S.A. Muratov was an advocate for human-oriented TV (it was debated in the 1960s) and he did not consider his involvement in KVN to be worthy of attention. During the course the festival got the name *Muratov-TV*, the participants had to prepare for the show and competition interviews with people of older generation who remember the television of the 1960s.

They invited former Muratov's students, his relatives and guests of these interviews to the festival. The key message of the festival was the motto "We are for sincerity!" Students almost immediately started to call the future festival "tube". According to the dictionary of modern slang, this means "nostalgic, warm, cozy". One of the versions of its origin is old vacuum-tube radiograms which produce a warm, pleasant sound, while modern electronics produce a barren and cold sound.

Here is an example of a theoretical and practical class (without gamification), devoted to soft skills immersion. Students had to guess the most relevant skills at different stages of the human society development, useful knowledge for applied and theoretical work. A detailed scheme of soft skills and short 4C were presented, soft skills and hard skills features were introduced and examples are provided. Soft skills were presented as an organic part of the information society. Comparing hard skills and soft skills brought about debates. Here are the topics of several issues discussed: what type of skills is more relevant to solve this problem (the examples are given) - soft or hard; which is easier to master - soft skills or hard skills; which of the two types of skills a TV reporter needs; if it is possible to solve real problems of communication taking into consideration only one group of skills. As a result, the students got the idea of the reason to master soft skills, how super professional skills affect the career of a television journalist and producer, and personal success.

## V. Results and discussion

The total number of students participating in the project was 35, the average student attendance at class was 85%,

participation in the television festival was 100%, and the attendance at the final exam (in-depth interviews) was 98% of students. An analysis of anonymous profiles revealed that 100% of students would like to participate in new gamified courses, while 28% wished to change their roles. Some results related to the educational process are presented below.

1. The role of the professor. The main element of the experimental model is the professor, who first plays the role of a mentor, then a coach, and by the end of the course becomes a facilitator [16]. Analysis of in-depth interviews and express questionnaires of students draws a portrait of an ideal professor for the development of "soft skills" in gamification process. Empathy, a sense of justice, self-confidence, sociability, the ability to lead, to convince, and not impose one's point of view were the most important emotional characteristics. The transition from the traditional educational system to the game model of soft skills development was problematic for 43% of students at the first stage. Most of them turned out to be introverts, according to C. Pearson's archetypes, they were the innocent, the seeker and the orphan. They are not easy to master the skills of communication, coordination and creativity. Such students feel uncomfortable with socially successful extrovert classmates. Under these circumstances, if the professor is deprived of empathy and acts in a wrong way, the students are unlikely to develop soft skills at all. It is necessary to sympathize with such students and find a special approach to them. Such qualities of a professor as being fair and attentive are especially relevant when assessing "soft skills", since he/she is inevitably subjective. It is important to recognize the real motivation of students, their real contribution to the common cause, and their true roles in the team. At the same time, the assessment of the students' work is practically depersonalized and looks simple when developing "hard skills" in gamification.

2. The hierarchical system of "teacher - students". The variability in communication between the professor and students was observed in the experimental project. Neither classical subordinate model nor collegial equality in soft skills development was effective. The most suitable positioning option should be dynamic, changing depending on the stages of Kolb's learning cycle. Replacement of educational communications with professional ones when a professor becomes an expert or scientific consultant (a model of loose submission) turned out to be productive.

3. The attractiveness of a gamified course. The game model of developing "soft skills" was found to be the only effective method of involving students with an extremely low level of motivation (12%) in the educational process.

4. Attachment to hard skills, in-depth study of the subject theory. In the absence of a clear professional benchmark, the transition to gamification in teaching soft skills can result in losses in the professional development of would-be journalist.

The main result of the study and the experiment is that students are likely to develop soft skills taking a course with elements of gamification. These two components interact effectively: gamification contributes to greater involvement in the educational process, personal perception, which, in its turn, mainstreams the appeal to soft skills.

## VI. Conclusion

The study of the gamification in teaching television journalism, namely the development of soft skills, is at the stage of experiments analyzing, setting new tasks and searching directions for further work. Correlation of gaming and classical practices in studying journalism, gamification technological support, philosophical and ethical issues of applying gamification method in education of to-be journalists in order to develop "soft skills" are promising directions for further research.

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