

# Use of virtual BREVIEW collections for studying Advertising and Public Relations

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## Abstract

This article presents the construction of a digital platform to facilitate the teaching of students in the pilot test on advertising and public relations. This platform was set up as a library of virtual resources that students can use throughout their entire degree programme. This project outlines how it was built, the classification criteria used, the materials placed in the library and, in short, how we defined the power that the virtual library has as a tool to reinforce independent study.

The way this resource is used and the possibilities it offers for both professors and students are some of the considerations that can be extracted from the implementation of the project.

## General area of interest of this innovation

The current launch of the new Bachelor's degree curricula entails exploring new methods that facilitate students' independent learning process. This text provides information on the construction and use of online resources, and it enables academic managers and educators to discover the difficulties and qualities of these resources in order to get the most from their use.

## 1. Objectives

The goal was to create and launch the virtual platform BREVIEW, along with defining and outlining the aspects that would be necessary for the future activity and progression of the virtual documentary collection. BREVIEW is a selection of digital documentary materials aimed primarily at improving students' independent learning, yet the faculty can also use it as it gives them access to an extensive virtual bibliography that can be both recommended and even consulted in the classroom.

Bearing all of this in mind, BREVIA is a tool that aims to facilitate users' access to virtual resources related to the degree programme in order to have available all the material needed for independent study (for students to study on their own and for projects) and to improve the dynamic in teacher-led classes.

## 2. Description of the project

The UAB has begun to develop the project to set up a virtual library in conjunction with three degree programmes it offers (Physics, Geography and Advertising and Public Relations), integrating it conceptually, organisationally and functionally within the digital media currently existent.

### 2.1. Technological and educational changes today

This initiative responds to the new problems and needs that are emerging based on the technological and educational changes in cutting-edge universities today in the implementation of the ECTS teaching methodology to evolve towards and adapt to the new situation. The main factors of change and the initiative of the project are:

1. The trend towards more prestigious universities.
2. The development of information technologies.

The development of information technologies in general, and communication technologies in particular, has facilitated a qualitative leap from the analogical to the digital age. As a result, both the format of materials and resources and how they are applied in university teaching practice have evolved. Adapting to these changes, the trend at the most prestigious universities is to offer their users (especially students) improved or selected resources and materials in digital format. In order to carry out these goals, virtual platforms like BREVIA represent the chance to step onboard this new juncture.

*«This trend presupposes the selection of the technological resources and infrastructure that need to be made available to users, in accordance with relevant scientific and educational criteria, an integrated platform of digital services based on a selection of up-to-date, varied materials, as well as painstaking design. One fundamental guideline in all this effort is to expand and improve the conditions of students' learning and independent learning.»*

The engine to take advantage of these ICT materials are the academic changes which have been prompted by the implementation of the new teaching methodology based on ECTS credits. These three underpinnings are the ones motivating us to develop these tools, which furnish higher quality and more possibilities for the new concept of learning that we aim to attain.

## 2.2. The trend towards more prestigious universities

Based on the infrastructures and technological potential that are possible and feasible today, we can discern a clear trend that cutting-edge higher education institutions are focusing on *«improving the services and (independent) learning resources in the form of virtual resources, and making them available to the users, their students»*.

The model to follow when building our own virtual library are the learning centres of certain British and American Universities (Columbia University, Harvard University, etc.); platforms with materials that have been culled and classified according to common, agreed upon criteria. For this reason, the UAB started its pathway by defining these working principles:

*«This means developing a model for managing, producing and choosing the learning materials organised according to certain common principles, as well as providing a classification system and access to these materials according to the functional criteria, which can be generalised to any UAB user within the different fields of knowledge»*.

As a virtual educational tool of the UAB, BREVIA must adapt to the characteristics of its own students and become an attractive tool for achieving the educational goals of our degree programmes.

## 2.3. The development of information technologies

In order to pave the way for the qualitative leap that is transforming today's education from the analogical to the digital age, the UAB has been equipped with the logistical and technological support of the virtual campus. The virtual campus will temporarily serve as the tool or base platform where BREVIA is structured and constructed. We hope that its scope will make it a much more general, effective and useful tool.

## 2.4. BREVIA: Instructions and basic protocol for creation and maintenance

This project is based on creating a tool that is useful and effective for students' independent learning in accordance with the changes underway today in fields like technology and teaching methodology. Therefore, with the intention of its becoming a user-friendly instrument for exclusively educational purposes, basic criteria for organisation, construction and maintenance of the materials or resources offered via this tool were laid down.

## 2.5. Classification criteria:

In order to facilitate simple information searches and organisation, the resources will be organised based on standardised library criteria:

*«The library of virtual resources for independent study should be a learning environment centred on each of the fields of knowledge and the different degrees programmes they encompass, in order to facilitate access to the information and students' independent learning processes in the different degree programmes. In order to facilitate the func-*

*tionality of this access, these virtual resources, or «library», must be organised according to standardised library criteria.»*

In accordance with this principle, a variety of data were suggested that could be included in the files on the materials or resources chosen: the usual cataloguing criteria (title, author, date, publisher, etc.), the key word (the specific area of knowledge), a description, the educational level of the material and the level of private/public access of the resources. The goal of all this information is to construct a clear, user-friendly tool. All the materials are organised into seven different sections: monographic resources, dictionaries and encyclopaedias, audiovisuals, databases, portals of resources, benchmark institutions and useful software.

## **2.6. Material available**

The main criterion to bear in mind in terms of the materials is that the BREVIA resources must be in digital format. Paper or analogical versions will not be catalogued. If this condition is fulfilled, the resources can be of different types, ranging from reference texts to selected articles to reports, problems, tutorials, field activities, laboratory activities, videos, etc. (adapting to the needs of each degree programme). Despite this, in line with the overarching goals of usefulness and efficacy, these materials should not surpass a reasonable number of 100 to 200 resources.

## **2.7. Several benchmark virtual projects**

Having analysed and studied a variety of works, the virtual platform of the Bachelor's Degree in Advertising and Public Relations was organised based on the virtual libraries of renowned American and British universities, in an initiative spearheaded by the Universitat de Girona, by the «Virtual Veterinarian» section of the Faculty of Veterinary Science of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, and by the working process of two other degree programmes at the UAB which are also developing the BREVIA project.

In the digital platforms of the most prestigious universities, we found a formal and technical model that has been used to build and actually structure the tool. The other three benchmarks, in contrast, have mainly been used to get to know the possibilities that an instrument of this kind can offer its users and the type of materials that can be offered on it.

The Universitat de Girona project is an example of the process of digitalising a bank of images (works of art) to improve the study and teaching of Art History. The initiative in the UAB's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine has created the «Virtual Veterinarian» project which gives access to an entire set of teaching materials (class notes, videos of operations conducted on animals, etc.) that might be useful for us

## **3. Methodology**

The goals of the BREVIA project in the Bachelor's Degree in Advertising and Public Relations are to create a virtual library of digital resources chosen according to their

degree of relevancy and interest for students and for their independent learning. Despite this, based on these studies two aspects were added that are important, or at the very least interesting: the educational purpose of the tool and the process of adapting the instrument to the users. The design of BREVIA is being developed to improve independent learning in order to achieve the specific profiles of the degree programme. The goal is to construct a primarily educational virtual platform that exceeds certain access limitations (like timetables and location) of the current Library of Communications Studies and the General Periodicals Library. In accordance with the potential offered by the digital era, the new formats enable us to overcome these barriers. Indeed, the goal is not to construct and create and «second» library but to make available to students (and other users) a tool especially designed for their degree programme.

### **3.1. Development of the project and adaptation of the tool**

The entire design of the project has been planned to not contradict the principles that are being instituted with the new teaching methodology, ensuring that the tool created is adapted to the new environment in which it must operate. One of the characteristics of the academic reform is that students must acquire skills related to the professional profile determined for each degree programme. In the case of the Bachelor's Degree in Advertising and Public Relations, the professional profiles defined based on which the digital resources are being gathered are the following:

1. Strategist. Consultant in commercial communication and public relations.
2. Creativity, design and management of production in advertising and public relations.
3. Account manager in advertising and public relations.
4. Media planner.
5. Consumer and market researcher.

### **3.2. Surveys to identify users' needs**

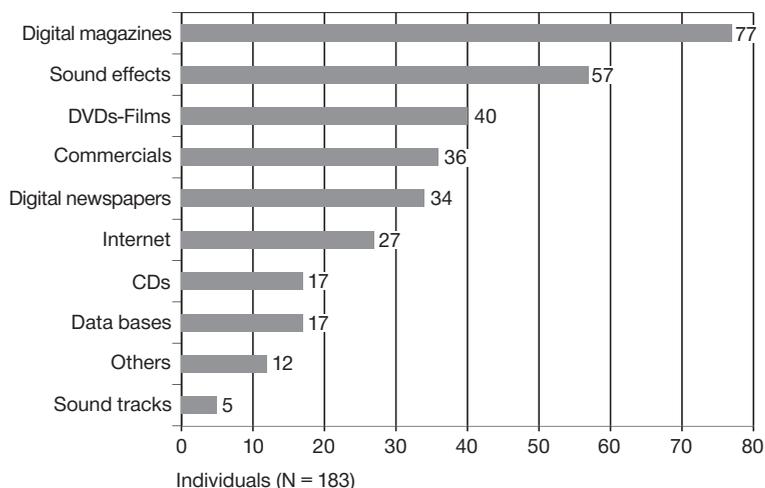
Bearing in mind that the main purpose of this project is to create a working tool (the virtual platform) that is useful and effective for its users, in the degree programme a survey was administered to identify students' needs and therefore determine which sections and types of material were the most suitable to include in the new academic instrument.

Based on this survey, which was administered to students in the Bachelor's Degree in Advertising and Public Relations at the start of the project, we were able to identify their working habits with respect to the use of digital resources. In this way, we managed to draw up a list of the needs we detected that BREVIA could resolve as an educational tool within the framework of university learning.

First of all, the students' responses on the use of resources in the current Library of Communications Studies indicated their tendency to use them while studying for their courses. Indeed, 79% of the students admit to having used the current Library of Commu-

nications Studies only «occasionally throughout the academic year», which leads us to believe that they only go there when they need to because of specific projects or exercises and that they do not tend to use it as an indispensable part of their learning (only 15% go there regularly). At the same time, it was interesting to discover which digital resources they use so that BREVIA could focus on the resources most in demand. This information is expressed in absolute numbers in the figure below (Figure 1) from a broad sample (N=183) of the subjects.

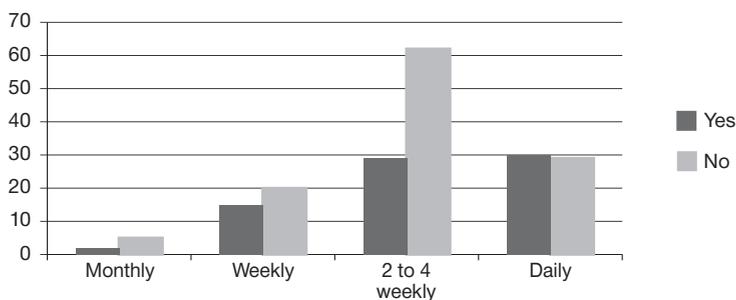
Figure 1. Use of digital resources in the current library (February 2006)



Likewise, we also researched the use of the virtual platform for teaching courses at the UAB, the virtual campus, because it is the technological platform where BREVIA is to be located. Absolutely all the students in this survey had entered the virtual campus, therefore demonstrating that it is already a tool that is well-integrated into the educational sphere. What is more, its success and usefulness is reflected in the frequency with which the virtual campus is used: a total of 77% of the students use it more than twice a week. Taking advantage of the existence of a virtual campus related to the educational goals of each degree programme, we had to discover to what extent Advertising students were aware of the section of the campus in which BREVIA would be included. We could estimate to what extent the students used that part of the virtual campus before installing the BREVIA project there. Here, the results dropped steeply: 59% of the students in this degree programme had never checked the section «Resources of the degree programme» within their virtual campus screen (Figure 2). Delving further into this, we researched the profile of the users who were already aware of this section of the virtual campus prior to BREVIA. We confirmed that the students who

used the virtual campus daily were the ones who already knew about these resources (60%) ( $\chi^2_{(3)}=11,03, p<0,012$ ). This once again became clear in the positive relationship in that the students that used to virtual campus more often are also the ones who use the resources available for the degree programme more often ( $r_{(181)}=0,134, p<0,033$ ).

Figure 2. Knowledge of the section «Resources of the degree programme» (February 2006)



The final results of this survey of students helped us to establish the digital resources that they tend to use the most which are now located in the library (digital magazines and newspapers in the sector, sound effects and adverts, in first place). The research also showed that the knowledge and use of the section where BREVIA was to be housed was closely linked to the students' study habits on the virtual campus. Therefore, we considered it extremely important to make the virtual space easily available.

### 3.3. Contributions by students

The students offered many comments in this initial survey. Indeed, 54% of the respondents shared their personal ideas, which we should regard as successful bearing in mind that they could do so in an open-ended question at the end of the survey. The students in the fourth year of the programme provided much more specific comments than the students in the previous years, who had fewer and more general comments. Broadly speaking, they requested digital resources or materials. The students requested reference works (books, theses and monographs) and digital magazines. They also wanted banks of images, photographs, sounds and adverts (either graphic or audiovisual) and databases related to the programme (databases from institutions like SOFRES, INFOADEX, etc.). Apart from this, they expressed an interest in having access to directories of websites related to the degree programme. They mentioned having the email addresses of advertising agencies, search engines, translators, forums, pages with downloads (of software, old and current advertising campaigns) and the like. A

widespread wish detected in the comments of many students was to acquire paid databases that are interesting which, if possible, they could access from their homes.

### 3.4. The virtual platform of the degree programme

The structure originally proposed for the platform was adapted to the particular needs of the degree programme. Bearing in mind the needs identified in future users, the structure was redefined as shown in Figure 3. Once the structure was defined and the contents prepared, the virtual library was launched following the appearance of the UAB's virtual campus (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Detailed schema of the organisation of BREVIA 2006

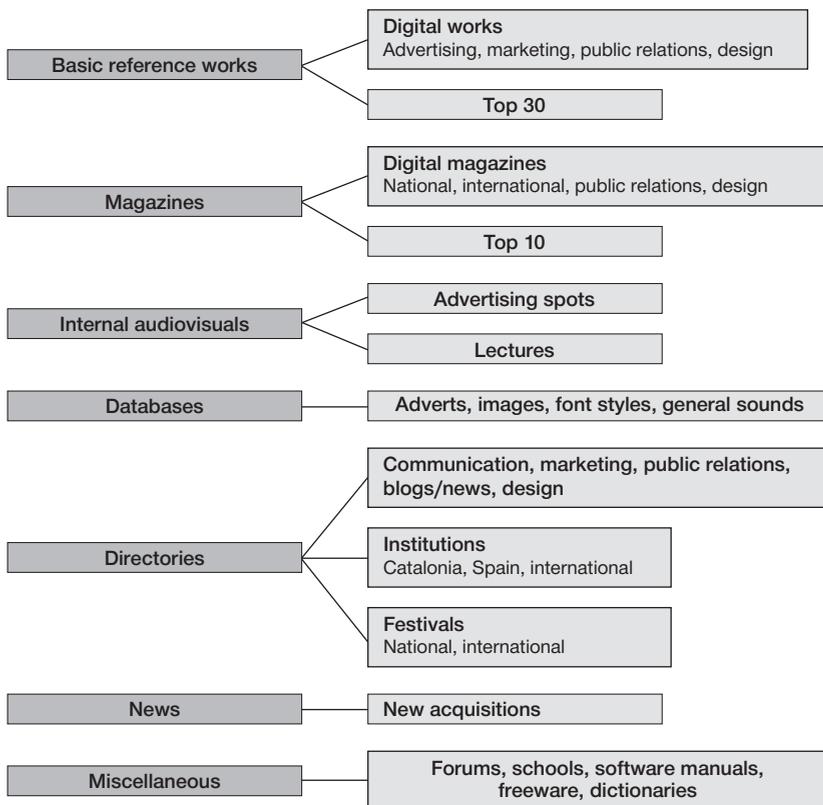


Figure 4. Sample of the BREVIA 2006 virtual platform



#### 4. Results

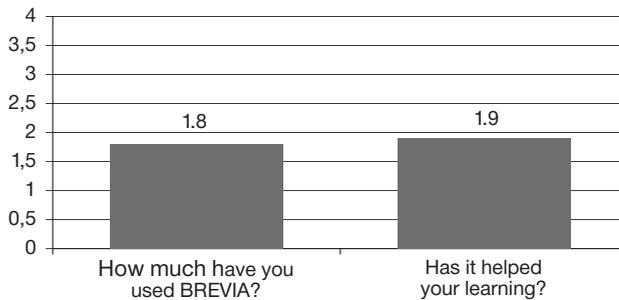
Below are the data on the use of BREVIA by students in the Bachelor's Degree in Advertising and Public Relations. The survey was conducted as part of the follow-up report on the pilot tests at the UAB, which show the results from the «Questionnaire on the introduction of the UAB to the European Higher Education Area». The survey was piloted by the Research Group in Education and Work from the UAB's Department of Sociology.

We should bear in the mind that the results of this report only include students attending the class, who have certain specific characteristics. We should also take into account that the questionnaire was administered towards the end of the second term in academic year 2006-07, so the specific features of this term might affect the profile of students who responded. Of the questions on the survey, one referred to the use of the virtual library. The result shows that the degree to which BREVIA was used was rather low. This leads us to believe that these resources need to be promoted, given the fact that we believe that students do not habitually use them (Figure 5).

#### 5. Conclusions

BREVIA is an extremely useful platform for the new teaching methodology. We managed to gather together a considerable collection of digital resources. Once the tool was launched, it must be updated constantly in order to ensure its usefulness and validity and to make it more visible for users. Having worked on the basic cornerstones of BREVIA, the main goals of the project were the maintenance and consequently functionality or usefulness of the new tool. For this reason, the virtual collection using the new technologies

Figure 5. Degree to which BREVIA is used



must be managed by focusing on learning within the new teaching methodology. Finally, the main purpose was to foster the use of the tool, to fine-tune it and promote it with its users, among whom the overall assessment was highly positive.

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### Interesting links

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- COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK. Educational project. <http://ci.columbia.edu/ci/eseminars/journalism.html>. 13/07/06.
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- MURDOCH UNIVERSITY. Educational project. <http://www.oib.murdoch.edu.au/database>. 13/07/06.

### Keywords

Virtual resources, support for independent learning, virtual library.

### Financing

Use of virtual collection for students in Advertising and Public Relations. UAB Teaching Innovation Project (2005).

**Supplementary materials on the CD-Rom**

Demonstration of BREVIA (Virtual Resources Library) by Advertising and Public Relations

**Project leader**

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**Presentation of the project leader and working group**

Using the abbreviation GRP, a group of advertising and public relations professors from the UAB gathers together to offer research and training services in addition to their teaching duties within the university.

The core group is made up of professors from the Advertising and Public Relations Unit who teach in the Bachelor's Degree in Advertising and Public Relations and in the doctoral programme on «Advertising and Public Relations: Branding and audience strategies». Unlike other groups, GRP is open and its membership changes depending on the type of research or assignment. This enables doctoral students to join the group. Thanks to this dynamic, the young researchers receive backing and advice in developing projects. To date, research has been conducted that is financed by a variety of companies and private institutions: Bayer S.A., Lloreda S.A. (KH7), El Gremi de Publicitat, and a variety of MQD-AGAUR teaching innovation projects and teaching innovation projects with the support of the UAB's IDES.

**Members of the project**

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