

THE AUDIOVISUAL TURN: RETHINKING KNOWLEDGE, PEDAGOGY, AND RESEARCH IN THE SCREEN AGE

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary era is defined by the dominance of screens and audiovisual media in everyday life, reshaping how knowledge is produced, disseminated, and consumed. This paper explores the “audiovisual turn” in education and research, analysing its implications for pedagogy, epistemology, and scholarly practice. Drawing on theories of multimodality, media literacy, and critical pedagogy, the study examines how audiovisual forms challenge the primacy of text, expand the possibilities of teaching and learning, and redefine what counts as legitimate knowledge. Through a conceptual and analytical methodology, the paper highlights opportunities for inclusivity, creativity, and accessibility, while also addressing challenges related to critical literacy, institutional resistance, and ethical concerns. Ultimately, the audiovisual turn is presented as both a disruption and an opportunity: a call to rethink pedagogy and research in ways that embrace multimodal knowledge while safeguarding intellectual rigor and critical reflection.

KEYWORDS: *Inclusivity, Engagement, Creativity, Accessibility, Critical Literacy, Institutional Resistance, Ethical Concerns, Superficial Engagement, Professional Development, Methodological Innovation, Ethical Rigor, Policy Evolution, Multimodal Literacy.*

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INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has witnessed a profound transformation in how knowledge is communicated. The proliferation of digital platforms, social media, and streaming technologies has ushered in what scholars call the “screen age.” In this environment, audiovisual media—videos, podcasts, interactive documentaries, digital storytelling—have become central to everyday communication and learning. This shift challenges the long-standing dominance of text in academic and pedagogical contexts, prompting educators and researchers to reconsider the role of audiovisual forms in knowledge production.

The “audiovisual turn” refers to this reorientation toward multimodal, screen-based communication. It is not merely a technological change but an epistemological and pedagogical one. Knowledge is increasingly embodied in images, sounds, and interactive experiences, raising questions about how educators teach, how students learn, and how researchers present findings. This paper situates the audiovisual turn within broader debates on multimodality, literacy, and pedagogy, exploring its implications for rethinking knowledge, teaching practices, and research methodologies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multimodality and Knowledge

Gunther Kress (2010) argues that meaning is always multimodal, combining text, image, sound, and gesture. The audiovisual turn foregrounds this reality, challenging the privileging of written text as the primary medium of academic knowledge. Scholars such as Jewitt (2014) emphasize that multimodal literacy is essential for navigating contemporary communication landscapes.

Pedagogy in the Screen Age

Critical pedagogy, as articulated by Paulo Freire (1970), emphasizes dialogue and empowerment. In the screen age, dialogue increasingly occurs through audiovisual media. Research by Buckingham (2007) highlights the importance of media literacy in education, arguing that students must learn to critically analyze audiovisual texts as they would written ones.

Research Methodologies

The rise of digital humanities and visual ethnography illustrates how research itself is being reshaped. Pink (2013) demonstrates how video and visual methods can capture dimensions of experience inaccessible to text. The audiovisual turn thus expands the repertoire of legitimate research methodologies, challenging traditional boundaries of scholarship.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a **conceptual and analytical research design**, focusing on synthesizing theoretical perspectives and case-based illustrations rather than conducting empirical testing. The audiovisual turn is examined as a cultural and pedagogical phenomenon, requiring interpretive analysis rather than quantitative measurement. The design emphasizes critical reflection on existing scholarship, comparative frameworks, and illustrative examples drawn from educational and research practice.

Domains of Analysis

The analysis is structured around three interconnected domains:

- **Knowledge Production**
 - Investigates how audiovisual media redefine epistemological norms.
 - Examines the legitimacy of video essays, podcasts, and digital storytelling as scholarly outputs.
 - Considers how multimodal knowledge challenges the primacy of text in academic discourse.
- **Pedagogy**
 - Analyzes how audiovisual forms reshape teaching and learning practices.
 - Explores classroom applications such as documentary analysis, podcast assignments, and interactive media projects.
 - Evaluates the role of audiovisual pedagogy in fostering inclusivity, engagement, and multimodal literacy.

- **Research**

- Explores how audiovisual methodologies expand scholarly inquiry.
- Considers visual ethnography, participatory video, and practice-based research in the creative arts.
- Reflects on ethical issues of representation, consent, and distribution in audiovisual scholarship.

Analytical Approach

The methodology integrates two complementary strategies:

- **Comparative Analysis:** Contrasts traditional text-based practices with audiovisual approaches, highlighting differences in accessibility, creativity, and epistemological legitimacy.
- **Thematic Analysis:** Identifies recurring themes across literature and case studies, such as inclusivity, creativity, accessibility, institutional resistance, and critical literacy.

This dual approach ensures both breadth (across domains) and depth (within each theme).

Case-Based Illustration

Although not empirical, the study incorporates **case-based illustrations** to ground theoretical insights. Examples include:

- University courses adopting video essays as assessment.
- Community research projects using participatory video to empower marginalized voices.
- Digital humanities initiatives that integrate audiovisual archives into scholarly outputs.

These cases serve as analogues, demonstrating how audiovisual practices function in real educational and research contexts.

Ethical and Pedagogical Considerations

Ethical and pedagogical concerns are foregrounded throughout the methodology:

- **Inclusivity:** Ensuring audiovisual practices expand access rather than reinforce exclusion.
- **Institutional Resistance:** Addressing the challenge of legitimizing audiovisual scholarship within text-dominated academia.
- **Intellectual Rigor:** Safeguarding critical reflection and scholarly standards in multimodal outputs.
- **Representation and Consent:** Navigating ethical complexities in audiovisual research involving human participants.

Limitations

The methodology acknowledges its limitations:

- It does not include empirical testing or quantitative data.
- Findings are conceptual and illustrative, not statistically generalizable.

- Reliance on existing literature means the analysis may not capture all emerging practices in audiovisual pedagogy and research.

Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a robust framework for critically examining the audiovisual turn, offering insights that can guide future empirical studies.

ANALYSIS

AUDIOVISUAL KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The audiovisual turn fundamentally challenges the long-standing assumption that written text is the most legitimate and authoritative form of knowledge. For centuries, academic discourse has privileged textual outputs—books, journal articles, essays—as the primary vehicles for scholarly communication. However, the rise of video essays, podcasts, interactive documentaries, and digital storytelling signals a shift toward multimodal knowledge production that is reshaping epistemological norms.

Democratization of Knowledge

Audiovisual forms democratize knowledge by making it more accessible to diverse audiences. Unlike dense academic texts, which often require specialized literacy skills, audiovisual media can communicate complex ideas through images, sound, and narrative. For example:

- **Video essays** on platforms like YouTube or academic repositories allow scholars to present arguments visually, combining film clips, graphics, and narration.
- **Podcasts** provide accessible discussions of scholarly topics, reaching audiences who may not engage with traditional journals.
- **Interactive documentaries** invite viewers to explore knowledge dynamically, choosing pathways through multimedia content.

This democratization expands the reach of scholarship beyond academia, engaging broader publics and fostering inclusivity.

Epistemological Shifts

The audiovisual turn raises profound epistemological questions. If knowledge can be embodied in sound and image, then the criteria for legitimacy must expand beyond textual coherence. Scholars must ask:

- What constitutes rigor in audiovisual scholarship?
- How do editing, framing, and sound design function as rhetorical devices comparable to textual argumentation?
- Can audiovisual works be considered “peer-reviewed” knowledge outputs, and if so, by what standards?

These questions highlight the need for new evaluative frameworks that recognize the intellectual labour embedded in audiovisual production.

Institutional Practices

Academic institutions are beginning to adapt, though unevenly. Conferences increasingly feature film screenings, multimedia presentations, and digital exhibits alongside traditional papers. Some journals now accept video essays or interactive projects as submissions. Yet, challenges remain:

- **Peer Review:** How should audiovisual scholarship be reviewed? Traditional peer review relies on textual critique, but audiovisual works require evaluators with expertise in media production and analysis.
- **Archiving:** Texts are easily archived in libraries and databases, but audiovisual works demand digital preservation strategies to ensure long-term accessibility.
- **Citation:** Standard citation practices are designed for text. New conventions must be developed to reference audiovisual works accurately and consistently.

Case Illustrations

- In film studies, video essays have become recognized as legitimate scholarly outputs, with platforms like *[InTransition]* pioneering peer-reviewed audiovisual scholarship.
- In anthropology, visual ethnography uses film to capture cultural practices, offering insights that text alone cannot convey.
- In education, multimedia projects allow students to produce knowledge in audiovisual formats, challenging traditional essay-based assessment.

These cases illustrate how audiovisual knowledge production is not peripheral but increasingly central to scholarly practice.

Challenges and Risks

While promising, the audiovisual turn also carries risks:

- **Superficiality:** There is a danger that audiovisual works may prioritize aesthetics over depth, leading to visually engaging but intellectually shallow outputs.
- **Legitimacy:** Institutions may resist recognizing audiovisual scholarship as equal to text, reinforcing hierarchies of knowledge.
- **Access Inequalities:** Producing high-quality audiovisual work requires resources—equipment, software, and technical skills - that may not be equally available to all scholars.

Synthesis

Audiovisual knowledge production represents both a disruption and an expansion of academic norms. It democratizes access, fosters creativity, and challenges textual dominance, but it also demands new evaluative frameworks and institutional adaptations. The audiovisual turn thus compels educators and researchers to rethink what counts as legitimate knowledge, how it should be produced, and how it should be preserved for future generations.

AUDIOVISUAL PEDAGOGY

The audiovisual turn has profound implications for pedagogy, reshaping how educators engage learners in the screen age. Traditional teaching methods have long relied on text, lectures, readings, and written assignments as the dominant mode of instruction. However, audiovisual media now offer new possibilities for **multimodal engagement**, enabling teachers to connect with students through film, podcasts, digital storytelling, and interactive platforms.

Classroom Applications

- **Illustrating Concepts:** Films and documentaries can vividly depict historical events, scientific processes, or social issues, providing learners with concrete visual and auditory experiences.
- **Fostering Discussion:** Podcasts and video essays can serve as prompts for classroom debates, encouraging students to critically analyze arguments presented in non-textual formats.
- **Connecting to Lived Experience:** Digital storytelling projects allow students to narrate personal or community experiences through video, fostering empathy and cultural awareness.

For example, a history class might analyze documentary footage alongside textual sources, encouraging students to compare how knowledge is constructed differently in visual and written media. Similarly, a science teacher might use animations to demonstrate complex processes that are difficult to capture in text alone.

Inclusivity and Accessibility

Audiovisual pedagogy supports inclusivity by accommodating diverse learning styles. Students who struggle with dense textual materials may find visual or auditory formats more accessible. Learners with disabilities, such as dyslexia or visual impairments—can benefit from multimodal resources that provide alternative pathways to understanding. This inclusivity aligns with universal design for learning (UDL), which emphasizes flexible approaches to meet varied learner needs.

Challenges

Despite these opportunities, challenges remain:

- **Critical Integration:** Educators must develop skills to integrate audiovisual materials critically, ensuring they are not used superficially or as mere entertainment.
- **Passive Consumption:** There is a risk that students may consume audiovisual content passively, without engaging in deep reflection or analysis.
- **Resource Inequalities:** Access to high-quality audiovisual materials and production tools may be uneven across institutions, creating disparities in implementation.

Thus, audiovisual pedagogy requires deliberate design, where educators scaffold engagement and encourage students to critically interrogate audiovisual texts.

AUDIOVISUAL RESEARCH

Research methodologies are evolving in response to the audiovisual turn, expanding beyond text-based traditions to embrace visual and multimodal approaches. Scholars increasingly recognize that certain dimensions of human experience, emotion, embodiment, and spatiality are more effectively captured through audiovisual media than through text alone.

Emerging Methodologies

- **Visual Ethnography:** Researchers use film and photography to document cultural practices, capturing gestures, environments, and interactions that text cannot fully convey.
- **Digital Storytelling:** Participants create short videos to narrate personal or community experiences, democratizing research by giving voice to marginalized perspectives.
- **Participatory Video:** Communities collaborate with researchers to produce audiovisual outputs, shifting authority from the researcher to participants and fostering co-creation of knowledge.

For example, community-based projects often use video to empower participants to tell their own stories, challenging traditional hierarchies of research in which the scholar interprets and represents others' experiences.

Democratization of Research

Audiovisual methodologies democratize research by making it more participatory and accessible. They allow participants to shape the narrative, ensuring that knowledge production is not solely controlled by academic elites. This aligns with critical and decolonial approaches to research, which emphasize inclusivity and respect for diverse epistemologies.

Ethical Considerations

However, audiovisual research raises complex ethical questions:

- **Representation:** How should researchers ensure that audiovisual portrayals are accurate and respectful?
- **Consent:** Participants must fully understand how their images and voices will be used, distributed, and archived.
- **Distribution:** Audiovisual outputs often circulate widely online, raising concerns about privacy, ownership, and unintended audiences.

Researchers must navigate these issues carefully, establishing clear protocols for consent, representation, and dissemination to safeguard integrity and respect.

Institutional Implications

Academic institutions must adapt to recognize audiovisual research as legitimate scholarship. This requires:

- Developing standards for evaluating audiovisual outputs.
- Creating infrastructures for archiving and preserving digital media.
- Training scholars in audiovisual production and critical analysis.

Without such institutional support, audiovisual research risks marginalization despite its transformative potential.

Synthesis

Together, audiovisual pedagogy and research illustrate how the audiovisual turn reconfigures both teaching and scholarly inquiry. Pedagogy benefits from enhanced engagement and inclusivity, while research gains new methodologies that democratize knowledge production. Yet both domains face challenges of critical literacy, ethical responsibility, and institutional adaptation. The audiovisual turn thus demands a deliberate, reflective approach to ensure that innovation

strengthens rather than undermines intellectual rigor.

DISCUSSION

Opportunities

The audiovisual turn offers significant opportunities for education and research, reshaping how knowledge is produced, shared, and consumed.

- **Inclusivity:** Audiovisual media can make knowledge more accessible to learners with diverse abilities and backgrounds. For example, students with dyslexia may benefit from podcasts or video lectures, while learners with visual impairments can access audio-described content. This aligns with universal design for learning (UDL), which emphasizes flexible pathways to knowledge.
- **Engagement:** Screen-based materials resonate with students accustomed to digital environments. A sociology class that integrates short documentaries or student-produced video projects can foster motivation and participation by connecting academic content to familiar media practices.
- **Creativity:** Audiovisual forms encourage innovative teaching and research practices. Teachers can assign video essays instead of traditional papers, while researchers can experiment with interactive documentaries as scholarly outputs. This expands the repertoire of scholarly expression beyond text.
- **Accessibility Beyond Academia:** Podcasts, videos, and digital platforms allow knowledge to reach broader audiences. For instance, public history projects often use film or podcasts to engage communities outside universities, democratizing access to scholarship.

Challenges

Despite these opportunities, challenges persist and must be addressed to ensure the audiovisual turn strengthens rather than undermines intellectual rigor.

- **Critical Literacy:** Students and educators must develop skills to analyze audiovisual texts critically. Editing, framing, and sound design are rhetorical devices that shape meaning, just as word choice and structure do in text. Without critical literacy, learners may consume audiovisual materials passively, missing underlying arguments or biases.
- **Institutional Resistance:** Academia often privileges text, making it difficult for audiovisual scholarship to gain legitimacy. Peer-review systems, tenure evaluations, and citation practices are still largely text-based, creating barriers for scholars who produce video essays or interactive projects.
- **Ethical Concerns:** Audiovisual media raise complex issues of representation, consent, and intellectual property. For example, participatory video projects must ensure that participants understand how their images and voices will be used and distributed. Misrepresentation or misuse can have serious ethical consequences.
- **Superficial Engagement:** There is a risk that audiovisual materials may be consumed passively, especially in classrooms where students are accustomed to entertainment media. Educators must design activities that encourage active analysis and reflection, rather than treating audiovisual content as supplementary or decorative.

Implications

The audiovisual turn carries important implications for educators, researchers, institutions, and learners.

- **For Educators:** Professional development is essential to integrate audiovisual pedagogy effectively. Teachers must learn not only how to use audiovisual tools but also how to scaffold critical engagement, ensuring that students analyze rather than merely consume media.
- **For Researchers:** Methodological innovation must be balanced with ethical rigor. Scholars adopting audiovisual methods must establish clear protocols for consent, representation, and distribution, while also developing evaluative criteria for scholarly quality in non-textual outputs.
- **For Institutions:** Policies must evolve to recognize and evaluate audiovisual scholarship. This includes adapting peer-review processes, creating infrastructures for archiving digital media, and revising tenure and promotion criteria to value multimodal outputs.
- **For Learners:** Students must be equipped with multimodal literacy to navigate the screen age critically. This involves teaching them to interpret audiovisual texts with the same rigor applied to written sources, recognizing the rhetorical power of sound, image, and editing.

Synthesis

The discussion reveals a dual reality: the audiovisual turn offers transformative opportunities for inclusivity, engagement, creativity, and accessibility, yet it also introduces challenges of critical literacy, institutional resistance, ethical responsibility, and superficial engagement. The implications suggest that successful integration requires a **balanced, reflective approach** in which educators and institutions harness audiovisual strengths while safeguarding against risks. Ultimately, the audiovisual turn should be embraced as a **pedagogical and epistemological partner**, expanding the boundaries of knowledge while preserving intellectual rigor and ethical accountability.

CONCLUSION

The audiovisual turn represents a profound reorientation in education and research. By foregrounding images, sounds, and multimodal communication, it challenges the dominance of text and expands the possibilities of knowledge production. For pedagogy, it offers opportunities for inclusivity, engagement, and creativity, while also demanding new forms of critical literacy. For research, it opens space for innovative methodologies that democratize knowledge but also raise ethical complexities.

Ultimately, the audiovisual turn is both a disruption and an opportunity. It calls educators, researchers, and institutions to rethink what counts as legitimate knowledge, how it should be taught, and how it should be studied. The challenge is to embrace audiovisual media without sacrificing intellectual rigor, ensuring that the screen age fosters critical, reflective, and inclusive learning environments. Future research should explore empirical applications of audiovisual pedagogy and scholarship, examining their impact on student outcomes, institutional practices, and the broader landscape of knowledge in the digital era.

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