

Jay Daniel Thompson  
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# Content Production for Digital Media

An Introduction

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# Introduction

Today's media professionals are content producers.

That is the argument that drives *Content Production for Digital Media*. This book has been conceived as an introduction to content production in its many and varied forms. In doing this, the text seeks to clarify why 'content production'—the use of digital technology to generate multimodal media artefacts—is a useful term to describe what media professionals do.

In making this argument, the book acknowledges that 'content producer' as a job title has become popular. This is suggested by even a cursory search of job advertisements. For instance, take the following advertisement that was posted in October 2021 for a Junior Content Producer role in the UK. This position involves

developing and creating content that can be used across a variety of media including digital, social media, broadcast or in print. Working to the customer/client brief, they research, prepare and develop the media messaging to maximise audience engagement, capturing the strategy and objectives of the brand and needs of the customer they are representing. The content they create can be used as part of media, advertising and marketing campaigns ... Junior Content Producers collaborate with designers and developers, using authoring languages to create content for the World Wide Web, which may include video, images, text (or 'copy') and web pages and social media content, so an enthusiasm for technology and creating great online experiences is a must.

In this brief description, we can see that the incumbent must possess a range of skills in producing media for online fora. They must have a knowledge of what audience engagement is, as well as an idea of how to reach the target audience for the organisation advertising the position. This Junior Content Producer must be familiar with marketing and advertising campaigns. They must be across a range of content that can be published in digital settings (video, images, text).

Relatedly, the book acknowledges that the role of a media professional in a more 'established' or long-standing occupations has necessarily expanded because of the plethora of content that can be produced in online spaces. For example, a journalist must not only be able to report on current affairs and tell stories; they must but also promote their work, construct and maintain their public images (e.g., via social media), interact with readers. In the chapters that follow, we look at what these

media professionals do exactly—what content do they produce? What skills must they possess? How do they use the technological affordances at their disposal?

It should be pointed out here that neither ‘content production’ nor ‘content producers’ are intended to somehow displace more specific terms such as ‘marketing’, ‘journalism’, ‘public relations’, nor homogenise those terms. Those terms describe distinct professions, the similarities and differences between which will be teased out in the chapters that follow.

Further, throughout the book, the term ‘media professionals’ is used interchangeably with ‘content producers’. There is good reason for this. The terms ‘professionals’ and ‘professionalism’ have long been associated with the possession of high-level skills, with a strong knowledge of a particular field of endeavour and with a commitment to excellence in that field. These are exactly the qualities that all content producers require.

Each chapter features an interview with an individual working within the profession or skillset that the chapter describes. These interviews provide an idea of the steps one can take in order to move into a particular profession. The interviews also provide a fascinating insight into how the media professionals understand the skills and knowledge required to undertake their jobs.

In short, then, the media professionals interviewed for this book provide an insider’s perspective on their jobs. What does it mean to be a digital journalist? A digital marketer? How does a content moderator spend their working hours—hell, what even is a content moderator? The chapters that follow provide answers to these questions.

## Web 2.0 and Convergence Culture

The very concept of ‘content production’ is a product of what is widely known as Web 2.0. Tim O’Reilly defines the term ‘Web 2.0’ as

spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an “architecture of participation”, and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences. (Cited in Fuchs, 2011, p. 288)

The term ‘Web 2.0’ describes a break from the internet of the 1990s and early 2000s, the so-called Web 1.0, which comprised ‘a network of pages tied together by hyperlinks, interconnected in a self-referencing mesh’ (Faife, 2018). That was an internet where interactivity, where networking with others was difficult—certainly more so than the current era.

Specifically, the concept of content production reflects a specific facet of Web 2.0, and this is what is commonly known as ‘convergence culture’. The term ‘convergence culture’ is indebted to the media scholar Henry Jenkins, who uses it to describe



the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. (2006, p. 2)

‘Convergence culture’ is where ‘old media meets new media’, to quote the subtitle of Jenkins’ book; it is a ‘technological process bringing together multiple media functions within the same devices’ (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3). This is a media culture in which a newspaper columnist writes copy for their weekly column, the latter of which is published in electronic and hardcopy form, alongside a blog, a YouTube channel and regular commentary on Twitter and Facebook.

Secondly, ‘convergence culture’ refers to a media culture that actively encourages media consumers to be producers. So, the *Game of Thrones* aficionado can binge on their favourite series while producing Photoshopped images of key male protagonists in homoerotic scenarios and tweeting these out to their 2000-plus ‘followers’. The label ‘produsage’ has been coined to describe what happens when a media user produces the content that they and others end up consuming (Bruns & Schmidt, 2011).

Thirdly, convergence culture is one that encourages participation. A key tenet of media and communications scholarship has long been that the media consumer is not a passive dupe to unseen, omnipotent forces; they/we make different meanings of the material we consume, meanings that can exceed and sometimes be completely oppositional to the aims and intent of the producer. This argument is especially salient in convergence culture, where media consumers are encouraged to tweet about current affairs and record their own cat videos.

As media scholar Ben Light puts it, the concept of ‘convergence culture’ ‘explains how technology, participatory culture and people are coming together with the potential to surmount rigid boundaries amongst producers from consumers’ (2014, p. 8; and see also Burgess & Green, 2018).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Web 2.0 requires that in the context of doing one job, the media professional must be able to perform tasks that might traditionally have been associated with a range of occupations. So, for instance, a journalist must be able to market their work and cultivate their public profile; they must produce content (via LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok) to suggest what their brand is: What are their areas of focus? What social causes (if any) do they support? What distinguishes them from other media professionals working in similar jobs?

## ***The Broader Picture***

It’s worth acknowledging that the kinds of changes described in this book are not unique to media professionals. Nor can they wholly be attributed to Web 2.0. These changes are symptomatic of broader technological and workplace trends.

For instance, myriad technological advances—smartphones, smart assistants and everything in between—have radically altered workplaces across the industries, in

everything from workplace efficiency to the cultivation of workplace relationships and even the ability of workers to ‘switch off’ from work at the end of a long day. These have each been the subject of important research (e.g., Gregg, 2011; Light, 2014, pp. 80–95).

Further, the requirement for workers to upskill and multi-task is not relegated to those working in the professions described in this book; this is a requirement that can be found across industries. These requirements frequently do emerge from technological advances, although they can also operate in the services of cost-saving; why pay three people to perform certain tasks when you could pay one? The cost-saving imperative becomes pronounced during times of financial downturn and instability, such as that which has been witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, content producers are working in an era of neoliberalism, which is

in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (Harvey, 2005, p. 2)

Neoliberalism arose during the late twentieth century and has flourished in the twenty-first. The emphasis on entrepreneurialism and self-branding that is everywhere evident among content producers and media professionals—and particularly the social media influencer (discussed at different points throughout this book)—is just one example of neoliberalism’s impact on media culture (Khamis et al., 2016).

The trends that we’ve just described, and their impact on media cultures throughout the world, are all deserving of further examination. Such an examination is beyond the scope of *Content Production for Digital Media*.

## ***Chapter Summary and Structure***

Chapter 1 explores the rise of social media, and some of the ways this has not only reshaped media production, but also reshaped what it means to be a media professional. Social media platforms are no longer (if they ever were) only sites of fun and pleasure; they are also sites of labour.

Chapter 2 explores the importance for content producers of identifying their target audience and knowing the techniques and platforms that are required to reach that audience. Chapter 3 explores the world of digital journalism. Chapters 4 and 5 examine producing digital marketing and public relations, respectively. Chapter 6 examines the burgeoning, interrelated fields of online community management and content moderation. Chapter 7 looks at establishing a career as a freelance media professional. Chapters 8 and 9 examine vlogging and podcasting, respectively. Chapter 10 examines the importance of ethical principles, with case studies that illustrate how those principles can be applied to the fields of journalism and marketing. Chapter 11 explores the issue of intellectual property—what is it, and why is it such

an important concept for media professionals to grasp? The Conclusion sums up the points made throughout the text.

*Content Production for Digital Media* concludes with a brief list of Further Reading. The texts therein contain further practical and/or theoretical perspectives on working as a media professional in the twenty-first century.

In each chapter, there are quizzes. These quizzes allow the readers to consolidate their knowledge, to test what they have grasped and what they have yet to grasp. The exceptions to this are the Introduction, Conclusion and Further Reading chapter.

## ***Who Should Read This Book?***

This book is aimed at students and educators of media and communications, as well as media professionals.

The authors hope that students gain valuable perspectives on the topics under discussion. The book makes no pretence to being a career guide or of attempting to persuade the reader to pursue a particular career. Nonetheless, if reading this work encourages (say) the public relations student to become interested in the activities carried out by marketers, then this can only be a good thing; it's no exaggeration to say that in a convergent media culture, you can never be too skilled.

The authors hope that educators will find the blend of theory, reflections from industry and suggestions for classroom activities to be useful in their classrooms. There have been many fine studies of media production; some of these are listed in the 'Further Readings' section. *Content Production for Digital Media* is one of the first books to bring together educational material about such a broad range of professions and activities in the same volume.

The authors hope that media/comms professionals will read the text, identify what could be useful in educating future media professionals, and the areas that still require further examination in a classroom setting. Perhaps these professionals want to upskill in order to change careers; perhaps they are perfectly happy staying where they are, but want to add some new skills to their repertoire.

No prior knowledge of the topics discussed throughout the book is assumed.

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# Chapter 1

## Social Media in Content Production



### Introduction

This chapter explores the crucial and multi-faceted role that social media has played in content production. The chapter begins by examining some of the considerations that social media professionals make when deciding which platform to use when doing their jobs. There is a discussion of social media strategies and analytics, as well as the need to separate fact from fiction. The latter is, we point out, an especially challenging task on social media, where appearance is everything and fake news travels fast.

Journalist Ben Millar closes proceedings, sharing insights into the ways in which working journalists use social media to generate and research stories. His insights will hopefully have relevance to a range of other digital media professions.

### Which Platform Should a Content Producer Use? When? Why?

These are not easy questions to answer, not least because social media is dynamic. The nature and number of platforms, the technology and the devices that support them, and the formats that work best on them, are in continual flux.

TikTok and Snapchat base their content on the ephemeral and the pictorial. Instagram and Pinterest too are largely visual in terms of how they communicate. YouTube is a video streaming platform. Facebook, LinkedIn, Reddit and Twitter use a combination of visual and text-based content, perhaps more closely akin to traditional journalism than other channels. Some forms of social media, such as blogs and podcasts, are relatively passive, in that they require users to search for content on whichever blogging or podcasting platform they use. Others, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, are more active and are inherently dialogic: if you have the app, you will have content suggestions sent to you 24/7.