THE AGENCY OF CONTENT CREATORS

IMPLICATIONS FOR PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT AND MEDIA INDUSTRIES

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to discuss some key challenges of content creation as a social and cultural practice, with agency as the analytic lens. The agency of content creators has partly been related to tensions around personal engagement using digital media, and partly about the growth of creative industries and the present economic crisis as ways of understanding transformations of content workers and employment options of young people today and in the years to come. Contemporary media developments represent both opportunities and challenges for people as content creators and the growth of creative industries and a participatory public.

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Introduction

In knowledge-based societies, the ability to interact, collaborate, shape and share content through media is increasingly crucial to ordinary people's employment options, to their citizenship and socio-cultural forms of networking (Drotner & Schrøder 2010). In tandem with these contested transformations, the media landscape itself undergoes fundamental, if divisive, changes in terms of technological digitisation, global forms of distribution and ownership and rapid uptake of online services for social networking. As such, digital media have created affordances for content creation of a scale and type never seen before in cultural history.

Much of the traditional media-industry dominance has been deflated in the new context of networked communication and participation (Jin 2013). For instance, file-sharing networks are now an essential part of the media industry where users become distributors and generators of added value. In this sense, the boundary between producers, distributers and consumers of media goods is increasingly blurred, fuelled by creativity and through the social networking of individuals, dramatically changing traditional models of mass communication, media use and the media industries.

The social practice of content creation and people's involvement as content creators has received a lot of attention during the last decade as new ways of socialising (Ito 2010). Some also emphasise that digital media in the hands of people represent a democratic potential, engaging people in different public discourses (Cassell, Huffaker & Tversky 2005). At the same time these developments of content creation among people have had a fundamental impact on the growth of creative and cultural industries (UNCTAD 2008). This part of the economic sector has become an important area among European countries with prospects for new employment markets. At the same time this bottom-up development created through the social practices of people using new media has also led to new media structures and different corporate models feeding on what people themselves produce, for example as seen by Facebook, Google or Wikipedia.

The main focus in this article is on content creation as a social and cultural practice, with agency as the analytic lens. The agency of content creators is an issue of great importance not only in relation to personal trajectories of engagement and creative practices provided by digital media, but also in relation to public issues of employment options and democratic participation. Studying audience-as-producers opens up issues of displacement of content workers from a professional agenda to career opportunities in diverse ways for young people in general. Contemporary media developments represent both opportunities and challenges for people as content creators and the growth of creative industries, as will be discussed in this article. A key question will then be: agency and content creation by whom and for what purpose?

I will elaborate on the implications of content creation and agency using digital media on two different levels. For each I will highlight one key tension. One implication is about personal engagement, where the tension is about how large corporate structures are reusing and feeding on content provided by others in certain ways. The other implication is about the growth of creative industries, where the tension is created by the present economic crisis and the role prescribed to these industries

in contemporary societies as means for economic development. As such I am trying to combine two analytic levels (Erstad 2008) – partly about how people use and create with digital media, and partly about the mechanisms of digital media in structuring these processes. Both levels are key aspects of addressing agency and democratic engagement among a participatory public (Dahlgren 2010; Loader & Mercea 2012).

Conceptual Considerations

Agency is often located in various relationships between self and structure, or elaborated as various forms of agency, including the technological, human, and textual (Hardy 2004). The important point is that agency implies "the capacity to make a difference" (Castor & Cooren 2006) linked to certain institutional and cultural practices. The concept of agency might be perceived as closely connected to the concept of identity (Hull & Greeno 2006) rather than just defining it as bounded by structure (Emirbayer & Mische 1998, 963). In this way we might better understand how agency shapes social action. By creating content people get the opportunity to "craft an agentive self" (Hull & Katz 2006), where they actively take part in a social construction of their own identity, as shown in research on digital storytelling (Lundby 2008).

The concept of agency has regained some interest in recent years moving more towards studying its embedded complexity and relatedness. Following Emirbayer and Mische (1998) I will argue that agency needs to be viewed as fundamentally relational, process oriented and temporal, between actors and structures. Emirbayer and Mische (1998, 963– 964) explain their position the following way:

> The agentic dimension of social action can only be captured in its full complexity, we argue, if it is analytically situated within the flow of time. More radically, we also argue that the structural contexts of action are themselves temporal as well as relational fields – multiple, overlapping ways of ordering time toward which social actors can assume different simultaneous agentic orientations. We claim that, in examining changes in agentic orientation, we can gain crucial analytical leverage for charting varying degrees of maneuverability, inventiveness, and reflective choice shown by social actors in relation to the constraining and enabling contexts of action.

I argue in a similar way, understanding agency as fundamentally relational, between actors and structures going beyond former one-sided points of view, either with theorists of practice (Bourdieu, Giddens) or with theorists focusing on goal seeking, purposivity and judgement (rational choice, phenomenology, feminist theories). Agency as relational involving different mediational means is also supported by developments within anthropology and ethnography studying people living within different cultural worlds (Holland et al. 1998). Digital media and content creation have become important ways that people engage in agentive practices in public spheres (Livingstone 2005).

The growth of content creation as a social practice has often conceptually been linked to creativity. Creation and creativity surfaces in ways of understanding contemporary developments of media industries, cultural production and about

participation in the production, consumption and sharing of media content. Creativity has been present in political and institutional agendas since the advent of a new knowledge economy. Immersed in an ever-growing networked digital era, creativity becomes a key point, since media industries' sustainability relies, more than ever, on this competitive edge. Creativity is, however, a very elusive term, somehow praising the unique, the idea of genius and the innovative, and something it is difficult to argue against (Banaji, Burn & Buckingham 2010).

Creativity as an individual competence with resonance on collective modes of social engagement and as a key trait of media production articulates the 'the competitive edge' with economic value. This should be conceptually distinguished from 'creation' as a philosophical concept that addresses the singularity of the work of art and its detachment from common modes of production. Although the romantic overtones are not to be overlooked, the conceptual distinction between creation and creativity is theoretically useful for media studies. On the one hand, because it resists subsuming culture to commodification, on the other because it allows the productive polarity of the cultural between singularity and universality, between social engagement and individual experimentation to continue to impact the manifold ways of meaning-making in our increasingly networked societies (Jenkins 2006).

Referring to content creation as a key element of new publics and democratic engagement establishes some interesting dimensions of the implications of such social practices. Understanding agency in content creation provides us with opportunities for exploring new ways of engagement and networking where digital media play a key role. Conceptually this is defined both in the ways people use media for certain purposes in social practices, and in factors defining the framing of such practices. Conceptually, democracy would then be interpreted as ways of how people engage in public discourses where content creation within social media has become an important new space for participation. A public would gain new affordances through their media use influencing diverse social issues, as for example seen in ways that social movements like 'Occupy Wall Street' use social media to have an impact on social developments (Loader & Mercea 2012). By being involved in processes of content creation people have a possibility to mediate or to transform their own relationships to their social contexts and those of others.

The Digital Turn

Europe was, from a very early time, a cradle of creativity, spurred by competition among, for instance, small city states in Renaissance Italy and, later, between emerging European nation states and beyond, connecting the world through the first waves of global cultural exchange. The development of states, industry and modern society went hand in hand with creativity, works of art and free thinking unparalleled in the world. Even in today's world, Europe continues to foster creativity, now in fierce competition and useful exchange with most of the rest of the world.

From another point of view one might say that the power of expression is a basic element of human development. The way we express ourselves, through whatever medium available, is one of the key elements in how human beings have evolved since our ancestors started their quest for survival. Humans are now able not only

to reinterpret the perception of their world, but also to find out more about the tools they used and the impact these tools have (Wertsch 1998). Building on the ideas of the French cultural psychologist Ignace Meyerson, Bruner discusses what he calls "the externalisation tenet" (Bruner 1996, 22). This refers to the notion that the main function of collective cultural activity is to produce 'works' – or *oeuvres* in French. This can refer to larger systems such as the arts and sciences of a culture, or smaller 'works', for example a presentation of a project by a group of students in front of the rest of the class. Bruner shows how important such collective 'works' are for producing and sustaining group solidarity and how they can help *make* a community. At the same time they are important in promoting a sense of the division of labour that goes into making a product (Bruner 1996, 23).

This externalisation process represents a constant orientation towards publicness where expressive acts of content creation become shared with others. People as content creators act with agency in ways that such mediational processes using whatever media available for expression can transform conditions within society. The last century has seen many examples of how books, journalism and works of art can have an impact on society and social transformations, from the works of Karl Marx to Watergate and Wikileaks. The digital turn during the last decade represents a much broader social force in the way groups and people engage in content creation and on a different scale than ever before in history. At the same time this opening up of content creation among people in all facets of society challenges the nature and meaning of quality information for democratic participation.

In a general sense the term 'mediation' can be associated with the objectification of symbolic meaning in time and space as part of socio-historic development. However, one needs to specify this concept according to particular objects, social groups and historical periods. Another point about mediation is that it involves constraints as well as empowerment (Wertsch et al. 1995, 24–25). Any form of mediation involves some form of limitation. It frees us from some earlier limitations while at the same time introducing new ones of its own. Our emphasis is often on the new possibilities that new mediational means represent for empowerment and new actions. However, we need to keep a focus on the limitations at the same time, on how tools shape our action in an inherently limiting way.

The digital turn of mediational means in our culture represents important shifts in the ways content creation through media play a role in contemporary cultural development and in personal ways of engagement. It is obvious that digital media represent new affordances (Gibson 1977) and possibilities. However, more important are the questions of how and to what extent they represent constraints or empowerment – as ways of understanding agency in using such media for different purposes. With an orientation from traditional forms of mass media towards new forms of personal media some describe this in the following way:

> As private individuals use media technologies to create and share personal expressions through digital networks, previous characteristics of mass media as providers of generally accessible information are no longer accurate… personal media are de-institutionalised/de-professionalised and facilitate mediated interaction (Lüders 2008, 683).

Media institutions are in a flux of transformations and transitions from professional quality provision of information towards a situation where the public

contributes to the flow of information in society to a much larger degree, de-professionalising who contributes and relates to information. The media are to a larger extent in the hands of people and they use these media to document their lives and their social worlds in different ways, from Twitter feeds and networking of special interest groups to examples such as Current TV building on the participation of people sharing information using their own devices and sharing it online. Developments towards personal media, especially with the impact of smart phones and other mobile platforms with a constant flow of information, raise serious questions about the key role of media literacy among people in their creations of and dealings with information in their daily lives (see review article in this issue by Erstad and Amdam.)

One important development leading up to our situation of content creation today is the way music has been made and expressed in later years, with what started as sampling techniques and the role of DJs in creating music towards the end of the 1980s. Several of the contributions in the book *Sound Unbound: Sampling Digital Music and Culture* (Miller 2008) show how digital media have had profound effects on the ways music is made and distributed today, and also how this relates to broader cultural analysis of developments within art where content within one context is reused within another context. The digital media have created a new platform for thinking about music production. As Keller (2008, 135–136) explains:

> *Early sonic collage, in the analog era, was painstaking and labor-intensive…Digital recording technology revolutionizes and democratizes this recycling process, making complex manipulation of recorded fragments easy and relatively affordable. And the Internet and other digital communications media bring a treasure trove of recorded sound directly to the sonic cannibal…this cultural practice profoundly blurs the line between creators and consumers of culture, turning listening itself into a platform for creative production and performance.*

In a similar way photography and image making has become part of people's everyday practice, with hundreds of photos loaded onto hard discs or new services for photosharing where photos are deleted shortly after they are shared (Snapchat). Digital media have created different conditions for processes of making music and taking photos. To what extent people use these possibilities to create new agentive trajectories for themselves is a more open question.

In a broader sense this can be interpreted as a new way of understanding a production mode in our culture. It is of course not new in itself and has been present within cultural studies for some time (Buckingham, Grahame & Sefton-Green 1995; Fornäs, Lindberg & Sernhede 1995). These studies show how young people take up and use available cultural resources to create music, film, and so forth. However, a major shift has happened in the way digital media have changed access to such tools and the ease by which such tools encourage content creation. Social media has only brought this further to a 'communicative mode' where content is created as a constant flow across time and space.

Of course, the copyright laws that regulate the markets of music and image production and distribution today are at stake. Legal disputes about copyright issues have surfaced more and more due to technological developments that create

new practices that evolve outside the regulated market. Lessig (2008) has been a key spokesman for the need to challenge the established copyright regime, trying to develop other means of handling copyright issues in his initiative on 'Creative Commons'.

Based on the above we might specify that "In an era of intensely networked systems, when you create, it's not just how you create, but the context of the activity that makes the product" (Jordan & Miller 2008, 97). The interesting aspect is how reusing content and manifesting new expressions can be redefined in different contexts. The ways young people experiment and explore the potentials of digital technologies are of special interest, and their potentials for creative practices of participation (Erstad 2010).

Content Creators vs. New Corporate Structures

During the last fifty years there has been an increased interest in ways of engagement among media users, constantly redefining audience studies (Jensen & Rosengren 1990; Livingstone 1998; 2005). Much research has been directed towards the consumption of media content especially by young people (Livingstone & Markham 2008). Sometimes as concerns about risks and influences from the media, other times as deep fascination with the reception and engagement by young people in ways of consuming media content, from books, cartoons, music, film, TV, video and so forth (Staksrud 2013). The ways in which we consume media have become increasingly more complex, hybrid and fragmented due to new ways of distributing media content to audiences. More interesting though are the ways audiences have become producers of content and not only consumers, and how these developments imply a re-orientation of agency among media users.

Engagement of Content Creators

Content creation is a very broad term including different ways of using media for distributing information. Still, the transformation due to the growth of digital media that is discussed in this article is partly linked to the increased engagement of lay people in productive practices as part of social life, and partly linked to the different modalities and platforms for content creation that exist today towards multi-user online communities and mobile technologies. The central question is of course to what extent such developments in content creation and creators imply a sense of agency or empowerment; is it engagement with a mission, naive participation or cultural displacement (Loader 2007, 1)?

There are a few examples of research with a more explicit focus on media production from before the digital turn, mostly with an interest in practices among young people and often done as organised activities connected to schools or community centres due to the cost and availability of equipment for recording, editing and so forth. Drotner (1991), for example, showed how a group of young people making videos were involved in aesthetic productive practices in their everyday culture. Similar examples of productive practices using different media within the context of media education are provided by Buckingham (2003).

Especially during the last decade we have witnessed a change in content production, distribution and mixing (Drotner & Schrøder 2010; Knobel & Lankshear 2010). Since the introduction of digital media and the growing access to such media

at home (DVD, cameras, mp3 players, computers and internet access), and especially since the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies that make it possible to share and build on others' content online, the interest in young people's production practices and content creation has been growing. This has created what Jenkins (2006) calls a participatory media culture. Digital media have increased the blurred distinction between production and consumption, for example as shown by Ito (2006) in the peer-to-peer exchange surrounding Japanese animation media mixes that rely on a combination of various analogue and digital media forms. We are now in a situation where potentially anybody with access to a computer and the internet can produce and distribute content, which others can reuse. The actual implications of this on cultural production and development are still in the making (Drother & Schrøder 2010).

The re-use of culturally produced content is of course not new in human history (Miller 2008), but the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies represents a dramatic change in the possibilities for content creation. Further, the growth and impact of social media as platforms for public communicative practices means that content creation is part of everyday activities, in everything from short Twitter messages, special interest groups on Facebook or posting videos on YouTube. Much of what can be seen online on sites like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter or Wikipedia, is based on activities where content is mixed in different ways. The main point is that content should not be understood as fixed and static, but rather as something that is moving from user to user and from context to context. The impact of such practices are especially seen in times of social change or crisis, as exemplified by social movements such as Attac, social upheaval in several Arab countries during the last couple of years or in the traumatic aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Oslo, where content creation using social media is both a way of communicating and a way to express opinions and emotions. As such, content creation as mediated meaning-making and communicative activity has become very important in our societies.

Youth has been a target group for most of what has been written on new media and content creation in later years (Knobel & Lankshear 2010) mainly because they are the prime age group using such media. And several authors have been interested in the ways these media developments create new conditions for political engagement among young citizens. Loader, in several of his books, has highlighted the possibilities, but also the new challenges for democratic participation within new media landscapes such as social media (Loader 2007; Loader & Mercea 2012). The opportunities for participation and letting one's voice be heard online are numerous. However, this also raises concerns about who is actually heard when so many are creating content and the level of media literacy needed to navigate and operate within these new media landscapes of content creation.

Creative practices are, to a greater degree than before, based on processes of sharing rather than producing content and, through that, developing specific communities of practice, of co-creative labour and cultures of collaboration. How this is played out in different creative practices will differ according to the contexts and objectives of such practices. There are also important cultural differences in the ways content creators are constructed. Many studies during the last decade show how young people in the USA create content using digital media to an increasing extent and with a high percentage of super-communicators (Lenhart et al. 2007; Ito

2010), while similar studies in for example Norway show a much lesser percentage of what can be called advanced content creators (Futsæter 2008).

In this sense we should also be careful in the way we describe young people as a digital generation (Buckingham & Willett 2006). Digital media are part of growing up today, but at the same time there is wide variation in how young people use these media for different purposes. Still, despite variations in amount of young people who can be described as active content creators, the ways some young people have adopted these media as creative tools raises important questions about social practices among youth and especially how these developments challenge some basic conceptions about education, schooling and learning.

The Tension

Agency is especially at stake these days where media systems are having an increased impact on ways of creating content. As shown above the implication of the digital turn has been an increased engagement of people in creating and sharing content online. Still, during the last five years another development has become more apparent. New business models and corporate media structures have evolved structuring online activities in new ways, breaking with the fundamental ideas of the internet as an open communicative space. This is seen, for example, in the ways companies like Facebook and Google are developing. Some describe this as the power of algorithms (Pariser 2011; Bucher 2012). This is of course not new since the internet has always been based on certain algorithms that structure what we can and cannot do on the internet. The new development, however, is the way these companies use the content that people provide by posting multimodal content on these online sites in order to structure our actions in certain ways and for certain purposes.

The examples mentioned by Pariser in his TED talk (Pariser 2011a) are illustrative. He refers to some personal experiences in using Facebook and Google. As an online activist he used Facebook to engage in discussions with people from the whole political spectrum, also with more conservative 'friends'. However, for a certain period he engaged less with these conservative 'friends' on Facebook, with the consequence that these friends were simply deleted from his network of discussion partners. The algorithm underpinning the way Facebook is structured had somehow erased these contacts on the basis that they were less actively connected. Pariser's other example is how he asked two friends to enter the same search word in Google, which was 'Egypt'. What appeared on their screens was very different. One received a series of links to sites for travel and holiday locations in Egypt, while the other received a series of updates on the uprising and the political developments in Egypt. The browser had adjusted the same search word to the individuals' profiles and former online activities.

In his book *The Filter Bubble* (2011) Pariser uses examples like these to address important challenges we are facing at the moment in our dealings with social media like Facebook and search engines like Google. These are not innocent and neutral technologies suited to provide for our personal engagement online. More and more these corporations are directed towards structuring and filtering our access to information and using our content creation in certain ways. The programmers and engineers developing the algorithms for how these services function have a lot of impact on our activities in using such media (Bucher 2012).

In summing up this section, content creation as a cultural practice on a personal level is developing as a tension between personal engagement in posting and sharing content online, and the structures that are now being developed within large media corporations in such a way as to define information for us, not by us. These issues have been part of the development of the internet for a long time (Anderson 2005). However, the impact and the scale of this tension today makes it a key research area for media research. A redefinition of agency (Emirbayer & Mische 1998) could be a way to analyse and understand these developments.

Creative Industries in a Time of Crisis

Another important issue linked to the developments of content creation and digital media is the growth and impact of the so-called creative industries. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in the UK defines the creative industries as: "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property". (DCMS 2001, 4). Agency in this sense is linked to employment options created by new media developments and transformations of content workers.

The creative industries and creative economy (Howkins 2001) imply a broad set of cultural activities with economic implications for innovation and exploitation of knowledge and information. These terms are difficult to specify since they cover many and diverse social practices (Roodhouse 2006). It is also difficult to clearly define which jobs fall under the heading of creative industries, which is reflected in statistics of labour markets within this sector. Some jobs that are clearly not creative as such could still be important for a creative economy. Today conceptions of creative industries are closely related to future orientations of the work force. These industries represent alternative paths of skills and competences to traditional labour industries of the 20th century.

In turn, the creative industries and creative-economy analysis in media research imply a broad set of cultural activities with economic implications for innovation and exploitation of knowledge and information (Sefton-Green et al. 2011). These industries represent alternative paths of skills and competences to the traditional labour industries of the twentieth century. Media constitute the main sector defining these industries, not only as tools for creative processes like design and content creation, but also in the way that media corporations invest in and develop important creative industries as economic forces within our societies, such as, for example, the Disney Corporation and Pixar or companies producing computer games. The value of the creative industries is both symbolic and economic. The symbolic capital arising from these ventures strengthens the self-awareness of creative societies whilst fostering a cultural legitimation derived from the recognition of its members as the vanguard of artistic production and reflection. Hence, by joining symbolic with economic value, the creative industries are now at the forefront of policy interests in modern societies and are thus deeply implicated in the creative economy, drawing from and impacting upon the cultural tissue and the ways in which societies represent themselves and lend themselves to representation.

According to *The European Cluster Observatory Priority Sector Report: Creative and Cultural Industries* (Power 2011), the creative and cultural industries employed a

total of 6.4 million people in 30 European countries in 2009, and regions with high concentrations of creative and cultural industries have Europe's highest prosperity levels. Furthermore, most of the top 25 highest cultural and creative growth regions are small and medium-sized regions. The term 'cultural industry' used to cover most of the employment and activities within the cultural sector represented by established cultural institutions in society. The term 'creative industries' is now used to include practices of content creation that people are involved in and which have economic implications for themselves and others often as small and medium-sized firms, for example within web design.

A core issue framing the relevance of a research agenda targeting content creation and creative industries is the present crisis in Europe with its implications for transformation and change on different levels. There is a strong policy pressure at present towards defining the creative industries as a sort of 'push mechanism' for innovation in the present economic crisis. The belief is that these industries represent new initiatives for economic growth when traditional media organisations and other industries in society are struggling.

Over the past two decades, growing attention has been devoted to the cultural economy as a powerful cluster of economic development in complex and educated urban societies. Studies and policy projects that aim to understand and invest economically in the creative sector have grown exponentially since 2008, as the financial crisis deepened and investors sought economic externalities as a way out of the quagmire.

Within the EU, attention is now directed towards the impact of creative industries for economic growth and as promotion for new sectors of employment. Within media research there is a need to address the role of media in creating new economic markets and the impact of digital technologies on media ownership, on structural developments of distribution and access, as well as new job markets opened up by media developments. In a specific Communication from the EU Commission (COM(2012) 537 final, 4) it is argued that:

> The cultural and creative sectors are faced with a rapidly changing environment driven by the digital shift and globalisation, leading to the emergence of new players, the coexistence of very big structures with micro-entities, a progressive transformation of value chains and evolving consumer behaviour and expectations. While these changes offer great opportunities in terms of lower production costs or new distribution channels, they call for action at different levels.

Further they argue for a multi-layered strategy, implying interdisciplinarity in the research approach and where media literacy and changing skills are important factors. The implications further raise awareness of studying the symbolic value represented by the creative sector and the role of media. Old organisational structures are challenged and institutional structures are increasingly influenced by creative practices. The knowledge economy forces us to rethink and re-address drivers for economic development and change and new business models emerge, often combining old and new media. There is a need to focus our attention more towards the creative workforce than just institutions and, here, there are implications for the role of the state and of citizenship in developing the creative workforce. As such,

we move between local, national, European and global processes as well as urban and non-urban, where the creative workforce is very often an urban development.

As a field of research the creative industries are just starting to gain attention. In the opening statement of the new Creative Industries Journal in 2008 the editor Simon Roodhouse stated that:

> *The creative industries, despite being an emerging field of study, have already come to constitute an important sphere of practice, representing an important sector of the new economy. The array of artistic and cultural production and distribution enterprises that constitute the creative industries has come to be consolidated under an umbrella that bridges the nexus between culture and economy. What sets these creative industries apart from other industries is recognized to be their creativity, a largely understudied area* (Roodhouse 2008, 1).

A focus on creativity is also lifted by different initiatives focusing on young people and education. One example is the creative partnership initiatives in the UK using different media and contexts to engage young people in creative practices. Again, creativity is used to develop engagement and ultimately for employment in an innovation-oriented workforce.

In summing up this section, the growth and impact of creative industries has become a new and important field of research for media and communication studies. As an area of society defined by new job opportunities and changing features of the work force, to some extent triggered and further enhanced by the economic crisis, there is a great need for a research agenda targeting these fundamental processes of cultural development and the impact of changes in media culture and mediatisation.

A Future Oriented Research Agenda

The focal point of much ongoing research is the interconnection between different levels that creative cultural production represent, from the social practices of individuals to collective orientations in media use and macro processes of the creative economy. There is increasing interest, both within the humanities and the social sciences, in studying how social media create new spaces for cultural participation, the implications of taking part in such networks for consumption and creation, and what is really meant by digital engagement.

The aim of this article has been to discuss some key challenges of content creation as a social and cultural practice, with agency as the analytic lens. The agency of content creators has partly been related to tensions around personal engagement using digital media, and partly about the growth of creative industries and the present economic crisis as ways of understanding transformations of content workers and employment options for young people today and in the years to come. In my view agency will be an important part of a future oriented research agenda for media studies.

A future oriented research agenda on content creation and agency would also have to include methodological challenges. Part of this would be to address and present arguments for ways in which media studies can strengthen trans-border studies and response-mode collaboration between humanities and social science scholars in order to enhance conceptual and methodological innovation. Several methodological issues become important in the years to come in order to address the transformations discussed in this chapter, both related to the role of the researcher,

research designs and moving beyond dichotomies of quantitative and qualitative methods. In particular, there is a need to focus more on longitudinal research designs in order to trace developments over time concerning audiences and industries (Lemke 2000). We also need to know more about the interconnections between online and offline media practices and ways that mobile technologies support content creation across contexts and settings. In response to these developments some argue for more processual methodologies (Drotner 2013) and ways of involving research participants in data collection as participatory research designs. Digital technologies also represent important developments as research tools, as ways of collecting multimodal data and software for analysing large datasets (data mining). The growth of content creation and creative industries highlights many of these methodological challenges for media research in the years to come.

In summing up and defining a future oriented research agenda on content creation and creative industries within participatory democracies I will focus on three key areas:

1. Production Studies, Productive Practices and Creative Learning. Studies of production practices in diverse socio-cultural settings is a key area of research in contemporary and future oriented media research initiatives. These include how professionals and semi-professionals are changing their practices and ways of distributing media content both within traditional media organisations and new online services. As mentioned above, the most dramatic change in recent years is the way people in general are involved in productive media practices, from postings and messaging on social media to multimedia productions. This implies a blurring of the distinction between amateurs and professionals, reorienting the validity of what constitutes the professional within a particular creative domain.

2. Agency, Participation and Sharing within Creative Communities. The making of communities around creating and sharing content has been growing as a field of research for some time, for example on gaming communities (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith & Tosca 2008), fan fiction communities (Hellekson & Busse 2006), and sharing of audio and video as DIY communities (Knobel & Lankshear 2010) and remixing processes (Drotner & Schrøder 2010; Lessig 2008). Of key importance in researching agency and creative participation is an orientation towards equality, digital divide, class and cultural capital, as part of cultural struggles related to content creation. This includes the relevance of issues of gender and age, minority/majority, immigrant populations, empowerment, and inclusion–exclusion processes of creative participation in future oriented media cultures. As opposed to more consumption-oriented studies, we need to study what people actively *do* with the media and the implications for ways of reorienting audience studies.

3. Growing Cultural, Economic and Creative Sectors. The technological developments of the digital age might raise hopes that increased production of media texts and artefacts by people outside the media and creative industries will lead to a more equitable distribution of economic assets in the development of the creative economy and new employment options. This, however, is challenged by evidence that inequality and social exclusion persist (Loader & Mercea 2012). There may be greater opportunities to become content creators, but the means of storage and mass distribution for profit are dominated by globalised companies (Pariser 2011).

Such developments also open up research orientations towards creative learning as ways of increasing young people's cultural engagement (Thomson & Sefton-Green 2011). Media literacy then becomes relevant, in particular the ability to engage in critical reflection by content creators as part of agency and public participation. Through reading and writing (multimodal authoring) we can develop social, cultural and political understandings of the world. These issues need to be critically addressed in a research agenda side by side with the economic edge of literacy. Media literacy represents a conceptual framework that includes an increased focus on issues such as creativity and critical reflection among citizens, as well as a strong emphasis on the production mode and the ways digital media impact on our cultural practices and social engagement.

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