

Managing Media Production in the Age of Convergence

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At every moment in their cultural circuit, older media forms and their producers are influenced by the presence and prevalence of newer digital networked media. These tools have quickly become appropriated in work-related contexts, because they augment means of communication at a variety of levels -- one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many -- and they have also become nearly ubiquitous in the personal lives of professionals (both in the media industries and elsewhere). Communication among individuals at all stages of production have become more diverse and less time-linked. Daily workflows at the production level -- processing of dailies, creating and distributing screening copies of work-in-progress -- have also become more flexible and diverse. Perhaps most significantly, the contours of the relationships between producers and audiences have become more open and more bidirectional.

All of this is happening with a certain degree of opacity from the perspective of media scholars, both because of "trade secret" shyness, and because the speed at which these technologies are changing often precludes the rigor and depth scholars require. An important first step in seeking answers to these questions will be to generate ethnographic research of both professional and amateur media production. Ethnographic methods, including open-ended cataloguing and directed, focused interviews, can help us look deeper to consider possible motives and context within which the interactions between media producers and digital networked media take place.

This is especially important as our collective understanding of the concept of "media industries" continues to change. The complexities of the work of media *professionals*, those who benefit financially from the media objects and services they produce, deepens as we learn more about the ways digital networked media have become elements of the production process. But now we are beginning to see a wide variety of ways the work of media *amateurs*, whose work includes fan fiction, remix culture, and critical media commentary, and which is often produced outside the boundaries of typical monetary economies, is moving quickly to the forefront of our minds.

Ethnographic methods themselves will also be changing as digital networked media become more ubiquitous. Direct, focused interviews may no longer be the first step when the research question is "how do media producers use digital networked media in their daily lives?" Instead, there are a wide range of social media tools already being used by these same producers every day that allow preliminary research to begin before the direct interview phase. For example, the rise of public blogging and the availability of public streams like Twitter and Facebook give the public -- both generally as well as academics specifically -- access to some producers' thinking in nearly real time. Of course scholars must be very careful about the extent to which we are willing to collapse producers' "thinking" and producers' social media feeds into one another: we should be aware of the significant element of performance in the ways individuals structure and

curate their social media as we conduct our research. But this does not obviate recognition of the fact that social media such as these are providing a new level of access to the day-to-day lives of media producers that is unprecedented.

Once these resources have been considered and analyzed, they can serve as a foundation for the more rigorous and in-depth work of interview-based methods. The answers to some important questions can be understood more clearly when viewed from this ethnographic perspective:

What new social practices in the cultures of production have developed as a consequence of the arrival of digital networked media? How have these media found their way into all aspects of media production so quickly? What are the nuances and contours of these changes? Why have some technologies been accepted more quickly than others? Who have been the individuals in each industry/medium/company/community who have most significantly influenced these changes? What have their motivations been? These questions cannot be fully explored, answered, and understood without finding methods to communicate with the people whose lives are affected by them from day to day.