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Co-creation of what? Modes of audience community collaboration in media work

Abstract

This article explores processes of co-creation in the media industry, particularly in the context of magazine media brands. We discuss the content and practices of creative collaboration between editorial teams and online audience communities. Based on two empirical case studies using analytical interviews and focus group discussions, we introduce a new model and framework for analysing co-creative processes. The model of co-creative collaboration is focused on three areas of media work: production, marketing and development. We conclude that co-creative processes between editorial teams and audience communities have a definite impact on the future of media work and media management. Importantly, the work of editorial teams is transformed from content production through creating platform concepts to coordinating, managing and nurturing audience communities.

Keywords

Media, co-creation, collaboration, participation, audience community

Introduction

The media industry is a business whose products and services rely more heavily than most on creative input. The conception and production of media content is a creative process that lies at the very heart of media companies. Following Albarran (2010: 83), media companies can be understood as businesses that produce and distribute different kinds of contents on different platforms. Their business is first and foremost about the creation of contents and concepts and about the development of new platforms and distribution modes.

The constant evolution of the media industry has given added importance to the role of creativity and self-renewal in media companies. One of the most significant factors in this evolution has been the development of digital technology. As a consequence, many of the media industry's most long-standing practices and business models have been losing ground. In order to succeed, media companies need to have the creativity to develop new organisational practices and procedures, new business concepts and new strategies. In addition to working on new contents, it is important for media companies to develop new and effective ways of marketing and distributing their products.

One of the major management challenges in the media industry today comes from the continuing expansion of creative networks, in which media contents are being co-created with audiences, users,

partners and subcontractors. The conception, design, production, distribution and marketing of media contents have all become increasingly interactive processes involving an ever wider range of stakeholders (Deuze, 2007: 66). Therefore, the management of media work is increasingly about the management of co-creation and partnerships.

The research literature concerned with the media industry recognizes the exceptional value of creativity to media organisations (e.g. Aris and Bughin, 2005; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; Mierzejewska, 2011). Nonetheless, there is a shortage of in-depth research into the processes of managing creative networks and their impact on the media industry and the way that businesses in the industry operate (e.g. Mierzejewska and Hollifield, 2006; Küng, 2008). Indeed, there is in general a scarcity of basic research on creative organisations in the context of the media industry.

This article contributes to the research on media work and media management, especially related to new media and digital culture. The need for research into media work and its management is acknowledged in analyses belonging to the media management research tradition. There is great need for research into the collaboration and interaction taking place within media organisations and their networks: this would help the industry develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of human activity in media organisations and in content production (Deuze, 2009; Mierzejewska, 2011: 21–3; Küng, 2007: 22).

Co-creation is a subject of much current discussion in both the media industry and academia, and it has the potential to become an eminent future practice in the media industry. It is therefore important to develop analytical conceptualisations and theoretical models of co-creation (see also Banks & Humphreys 2009, 402). The main theoretical contribution of this article is the new model we propose for studying co-creative processes in media work, in particular in the online context. Our model can also

serve in developing and managing these processes. The model of co-creative collaboration focuses especially on three areas of media work: production, marketing and development. The practical aim of the study is to produce new and up-to-date knowledge on creative collaboration between media organisations and audience communities.

Co-creation in the media industry

Media audiences, users and consumers today have increasing influence over media contents and their creation, production and distribution (e.g. Napoli, 2011). A large part of online content, for instance, is produced by users (Deuze, 2009: 145). Not just the media industry, but many other industry sectors as well are moving towards a business model where the conception, design and production of goods and contents all rely heavily on interaction and collaboration between consumers and businesses. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) refer to a paradigm of co-creation in which businesses and consumers work closely to create new contents that are meaningful to individuals and that generate value to businesses. Co-creation is based on a wider trend in society whereby consumers are no longer content with their traditional end user role, and want to be involved in creating and developing products and services, and share their thoughts and experiences with other consumers. (Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010: 3–6.) In this article, we use the concept of co-creation in a broad meaning, encompassing practices that also relate to communication in audience communities, such as the co-marketing and co-distribution of media content.

We deliberately refer to audience communities in the plural in order to stress how, instead of a mass audience, co-creative practices often take place in smaller, networked communities (Villi, 2012: 615). These audience communities are similar to consumer communities, where the cultivation of consumers'

communicative networks has great importance for media companies (cf. Kozinets et al., 2010). A close point of reference for audience communities is the concept of “networked publics”, especially when it is used to refer to a networked collection of peers (Boyd, 2011). Another point of comparison is provided by brand communities, which are important for companies seeking to engage consumers in co-creation (Hatch and Schultz, 2010: 594; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009). Brand consumption can serve as social glue connecting consumers to one another (Fournier and Avery, 2011: 195). The audience communities are mainly online communities, although the participatory capacity is not unique only to new media (Carpentier, 2009: 410).

From the point of view of media work (Deuze, 2007; Deuze, 2011; Banks and Humphreys, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 2010) and media management (Küng, 2007; Mierzejewska, 2011; Sylvie and Weiss, 2012), the audience cannot be regarded as a group of passive consumers, but as active participants in the processes through which value is created in the market. The industrial model of one-to-many mass communication is slowly giving way to an interactive model based on partnership and conversation with consumers (Hartley, 2004; Comor, 2010: 440).

Audience communities are mainly online communities, although the participatory capacity is not unique to new media (Carpentier, 2009: 410). Research on “citizen journalists” (e.g. Thurman, 2008; Ostertag & Tuchman, 2012) and co-creative practices in the media (Aitamurto 2014) has examined the participation of audience members in journalistic processes. However, despite the emergence of a participatory media culture, or “a more participatory culture” (Jenkins and Carpentier, 2013), and in contrast to the views that emphasise the significance of collaboration between media companies and the audience, many media companies continue to depend on the one-way mass communication model. Most legacy media companies are still hesitant to open up the production and editing processes to the audience (Bruns, 2012;

Domingo et al., 2008: 334; Hermida, 2011b: 21), leaving the audience to comment on or distribute already-made material (Karlsson, 2011: 79), or to provide audience content or “raw material” such as eyewitness footage or photographs, accounts of experiences and story tip-offs (Williams et al., 2011: 85; Wardle and Williams, 2010: 793-4). The audience is considered more as a source of content rather than as co-producers or co-creators (Hermida, 2011a: 184). At the same time, media companies increasingly highlight the significance of networks, emphasising how they should facilitate the formation of communities of interest around media content (Deuze, 2009: 152; Pitta and Fowler, 2005: 284). With this in mind, in this article we propose a functional categorisation of co-creative processes in the media industry.

Schau et al. (2009: 30–1) state that co-creative actions have not been clearly and uniformly identified and categorised, which makes it difficult to replicate and transfer successful co-creation strategies. In co-creation in general, ‘consumers participate creatively in the productive process both in production of content and innovation of services’ (Potts et al., 2008: 461). Direct and personalised interactions with consumers and consumer communities are essential, and the practice of co-creation also challenges the distinct roles of the consumer and the company (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004: 7, 10). As well as offering possibilities for consumer empowerment, co-creation entails a potential exploitation of consumers in corporate value production (Schroeder, 2011; Zwick et al., 2008: 166; van Dijck and Nieborg, 2009).

The media industry has traditionally operated in a dual product marketplace, where most industry sectors have simultaneously sought to sell content to audiences and audiences to advertisers (Smythe, 1977). However, in the context of the participatory culture, even the audience engaged in communication and production of media content is a commodity that can be sold to advertisers – for example, when users

distribute news stories or post photographs on Facebook (Fuchs, 2010: 191-2). In this sense, the media industry can in fact profit from a triple revenue source, with the third source – the communicative and productive activity in audience communities – assuming increasing importance (Noguera Vivo et al., 2013: 178; Deuze, 2009: 472).

The article addresses the following research question: what does the co-creative collaboration between media organisations and online audience communities mean and involve? To this end, we move on now to examine creative collaboration between two Finnish media brands and their respective audience communities, focusing especially on how the media brands use audience members as content producers and take advantage of the interpersonal and communicative dimensions of participatory audience communities.

Method and data

The empirical analysis is based on two case studies in the Finnish consumer magazine publishing sector. The data was gathered using analytical interviews and focus group discussions. These methods made possible an interactive, iterative research process in which new and up-to-date information was produced together with media professionals. In other words, the empirical data was generated in a research process following the principles of co-creation, i.e. the participants were actively involved in generating new knowledge and understandings.

The case study method is particularly well suited for research that is aimed at an in-depth understanding of social phenomena in their real-life context (Yin, 2009: 18). The two separate case studies present an

empirical investigation of co-creative collaboration between the media brands' editorial teams and audience communities in the production, marketing and development of media contents.

Compared to the single case approach, the multiple case study has the important advantage that it allows for the collection of a richer data set, a more varied analysis, as well as more reliable conclusions with high generalizability (Yin, 2009: 60–1; see also Doyle and Frith, 2006: 565). The two media brands, *Demi* and *Lily*, were selected because they are known in Finland for their advanced and successful collaboration with audience communities. *Demi* and *Lily* are examples of cross-media journalism (e.g. Erdal, 2009), offering multichannel content products and online services (*Demi.fi* and *Lily.fi*) published under the same brand name or as a brand family (*Demi* is both a magazine and an online service, whereas the magazine related to *Lily* is called *Trendi*). *Demi*'s online community was established in 1998 with the launch of the media brand's Internet site. The site provides a platform on which community members can discuss various topics and themes that interest the target group. *Lily*'s focus is on blogging: the site has more than 5000 registered bloggers. *Lily* was launched in February 2010. Both Internet sites are extremely popular within the target audiences. *Demi* has some 186,000 and *Lily* 172,000 unique weekly visitors (in January 2014, week 7), representing 75% and 50%, respectively, of the total target audience in Finland.

The target audiences of both media brands consist of young women and girls (*Demi* defines its target audience as girls aged 12–19, the target audience for *Lily* consists of women aged 18–39). These are particularly active target audiences and as such provide a unique window onto current trends in the media industry (e.g. Deuze and Steward, 2011: 4). The two media brands are mutually complementary cases in the sense that the focus in one case is on the discussion and interaction between the community members (*Demi*), and in the other on the community of bloggers and commentators (*Lily*). Taken together, they

constitute an interesting case study for investigating manifestations of creative collaboration between the editorial staff and the audience communities.

The empirical data set consists of ten analytical interviews and two focus group discussions. Each case study involved five individual interviews and one moderated focus group discussion. The interviews lasted 51 minutes on average and the workshops 130 minutes on average, totaling some 13 hours of transcribed, audio recorded material. The interviewees in both case studies were the editor-in-chief, managing editor, art director, producer and sub-editor. The interviewees were chosen because their job descriptions include responsibility for the supervision, management and development of both content production and community management processes. All respondents were asked the same guiding key questions concerning the modes of creative collaboration between the editorial staff and audience community. Also, each respondent's background, role and responsibilities in the editorial team were discussed in the beginning of the interview. The interviews were conducted by the first author in meeting rooms at the premises of the media company.

The principal method of empirical data collection was the analytical interview. The analytical interview is an interactive situation in which the purpose is to conduct a collaborative analysis of the phenomenon under investigation together with the experts concerned. The interview resembles an open-ended conversation, and the data generated is based on the interviewee's and interviewer's shared view of the phenomenon, a view that is reached in the course of their collaboration. (Kreiner and Mouritsen, 2005: 153, 160–1; see also Alvesson, 2011: 70–1.) In the analytical interview, both the interviewer and interviewee have active roles. Interviewees are not seen simply as respondents or informants, but rather as participants, even as co-researchers. The objectives of the analytical interview differ from the methodological principles of traditional research interviews. Interview studies are usually based on the

assumption that the interviewer has the role of an ignorant interrogator, while the interviewee is in the role of knowledge owner. The analytical interview, by contrast, is an interactive process that focuses on generating new knowledge and new understandings. Czarniawska-Joerges (1992: 192) speaks of 'insight gathering' instead of data collection.

The interviewees in each case study were at once the participants in the focus group discussions (e.g. Morgan, 1996). The aim of these discussions was to elaborate the data gathered through personal interviews and examine the preliminary analytic categorizations made by the researchers. The focus group discussions also contributed to strengthening the reliability of the analysis and the findings, since a collective discussion provides an opportunity to evaluate the trustworthiness of the issues and opinions raised in personal interviews, as well as collaboratively validating the initial analytical outcomes of the study. The objectives, structures and themes for the discussions were determined by the researchers, who also facilitated the conversation.

In analyzing the data, an iterative method appropriate for inductive qualitative research was used. The data was first read separately by both of two researchers repeatedly. They also wrote notes and memos about significant observations regarding the aims of the research. After discussing and negotiating their initial analytical observations about the data, they separately coded the data. They used a coding system guided by the analytical frames (production, marketing and development) of co-creative collaboration, which were based on an analysis of previous research in the field, as well as an initial analysis of the empirical data. After systematically reviewing the codings and discussing the differences, they constructed the categorizations presented in the findings section, as well as the resulting model. The processes of coding and analysis were recursive and partly intertwined. As Weston et al. (2001) have stated, coding is not something that happens before the analysis, but is an integral part of the analysis.

An analytical frame is a systematic way of seeing and organising the ideas and theories informing the research (Ragin, 1994: 55-62). It can be used to deconstruct a phenomenon into its constituent parts and to analyse the parts separately, in order to see how they are related, and to consider what kind of whole they form together. The findings of the study can be regarded as a conceptual description containing elements of interpretative explanation (e.g. Sandelowski and Barroso, 2003), because the main aim is to propose and discuss a coherent synthesis and a model of the phenomenon in focus, and to offer conceptual descriptions of related components.

In terms of research reliability, the analytical interview involves a number of elements that require special consideration, especially if it is compared against the methodological principles of traditional interview research (Kreiner & Mouritsen, 2005: 173). Analysis of data generated using the analytical interview must take account of certain methodological considerations and constraints. It is crucial that the researcher is clear about the role of the information obtained in the interview situation as research evidence, both in the process of conducting the research and in forming the analysis (e.g. Alvesson, 2011). In particular, the data generated in the context of an analytical interview must be critically assessed. When conclusions are drawn based on the interview material, it is necessary to consider what type of material this is and what kinds of conclusions are warranted.

From the point of view of the research interview this may mean two things. Firstly, media professionals may be excellent interviewees from a research point of view because they feel very much at home in the interview situation and they know how to get their point across in a manner that supports the purpose of the interview. On the other hand, for the very same reason that they have so much experience of interviewing, they are better placed to steer the interview situation according to their own interests.

Overall, however, it is fair to say that the familiarity of media professionals with the interview situation is beneficial with respect to the research data and allows for a more in-depth discussion on the subject.

Another subject that needs to be considered in the analytical interview is data manipulation by the interviewer. It is possible that the interviewer harbours motives that lead the interview in a certain direction and so impact the results of the research. For instance, the interviewer may try to get the interviewee to back her/his own assumptions. The researcher's active role in the interview therefore may influence the process of data generation and the research results. In our interviews the researchers' aims were made clear to the interviewees by telling them at the start of each interview that the purpose of the research is to describe and analyse new and emerging media industry practices and in this way also to support the development of the media industry and renewal in media businesses.

Findings

In this section, we introduce the findings of our empirical analysis. We present the analyses of the two empirical case studies from which our main outcomes follow, and propose a synthesis and outline the results of the study in the form of the model of co-creative collaboration in media work. First, we proceed to present the case analyses on which the contributions are based. The findings are presented following the structure of the model introduced after the case analyses.

Case analysis I: Demi

Discussions in the Demi online community provide the editorial team a diverse source for the *ideation* of new, up-to-date contents. By following the online discussions, the editorial staff can learn about the needs and interests of the community members. In this sense, the discussion serves as a source of information for the ideation of topics and issues and for the *planning* of the online contents and services. Discussions in the online community also provide valuable clues on phenomena that are currently trendy and popular in the community. Some editorial team members follow online discussions all the time, others less systematically but nonetheless on a daily basis.

There are two main ways in which the editorial team can draw on the help of the community in ideation and planning: passive and active collaboration. Passive collaboration with the online community means that members of the editorial team follow and monitor discussions on the website in the capacity of outsiders. They take no active part in these discussions, nor do they try to steer them. Editorial staff make passive use of the discussion in the online community for two purposes: they can follow the discussions in order to use them as general background material in ideation, or they can pick out concrete ideas from these discussions for use in a story that is being prepared.

The active approach to using the community for purposes of content ideation and planning is proactive and aimed at providing direction. The editorial team will intentionally start online discussions on specific subjects and steer the discussion in the direction it wants to see it go. Based on how the discussion unfolds, the editorial team members can form an impression of how members of the community understand the subject, what appeals to them in the subject and why. This will also help the members of the editorial team to develop their own views and ideas on the subject and gain inspiration and concrete ideas for stories. In particular, they will take the opportunity to drum up discussion on subjects of current interest or on phenomena that are hard to decipher, such as emerging trends.

The process of content *production and execution* is dependent on the community's active involvement. Comments produced by the community are used in articles appearing in the media brand's print magazine. The editorial team curates and edits new material from the audience-generated content for publication in the magazine. The editorial team follows community discussions every day (team members themselves refer to 'stalking') in order to identify interesting discussants to interview for stories that are going into the magazine. This means that community members get involved in content production in the capacity of interviewees. They are also sometimes used as models in the magazine's photo shoots.

The community members are asked to send in suggestions for questions for people who will be interviewed for the magazine, giving them a say on choices influencing content production. They also answer online surveys set up by editorial staff, and the materials generated from these surveys are used to produce new contents. The website attracts such a large number of weekly visitors that it is possible to conduct credible surveys and polls that help the editorial staff produce contents that they know will appeal to readers.

The needs and interests of community members provide direction to the editorial team for purposes of content *distribution*. Importantly, the dissemination of information about current contents is not primarily approached as a marketing exercise by the editorial team. The online service is intended as an arena for sharing and communication, not as an arena for content distribution per se. The members of the editorial team consider the production of high quality content and interesting services to be important for both the brand and for *marketing* purposes, for they know that satisfied users will happily recommend contents and services to other potential users. The distribution in social media of the contents available in the magazine and online service supports product and brand marketing. Community members will share links

among one another to interesting content, and at the same time commit themselves more closely to the brand.

The community contributes actively to *developing* and *renewing* the media brand by providing feedback most particularly about the contents and the usability of the service. According to the members of the editorial team, the community has a sense of ownership about the magazine and the service, and therefore it closely monitors and aims to improve their quality, often quite passionately. It is important that the community members feel that they can easily approach and communicate with the editorial team and that they also are encouraged to do so. Community feedback about the service and the magazine is usually immediate and spontaneous; there is no need to ask community members to say what they think. Their feedback is wide-ranging indeed, covering everything from opinions about the concept of the media brand to the smallest details, such as choices of wording or spelling.

A concrete example of practical collaboration and community involvement in development was the revamp of the online service, in which the community was actively involved at various stages. In the earliest planning stages the editorial team collected a wide range of user feedback, which provided an initial idea bank. Then a prototype website was set up for testing by 20 or so community members. In the next stage, when the online service was almost complete and ready to go, active users were recruited to test the service and to provide feedback. These people had been active users of the service for years, so they were well familiar with the needs of the community and were able to provide detailed feedback on what they thought the final website should deliver.

Case analysis II: Lily

The editorial team of Lily, our second case media brand, uses feedback from the audience community to tap into their interests. Based on this feedback the editorial team members try to *ideate* how contents and the usability of the online service could be further improved and developed. Some of the feedback is passive in the sense that it is not addressed directly to the editorial team, but expressed in the context of discussions within the community.

When the editorial team monitors the contents produced by the community and the discussions in the community, a common focus is to identify the subjects that are attracting the most attention and the themes that people are talking about. This allows the editorial team to tap into their interests when producing content. The content produced by the community members also provides material for the further development of ideas and to *planning* stories.

The focus in Lily is on creating a community of bloggers and their audience. For the staff, the blogs are a source of interesting ideas that can be refined into new contents also for the magazine of the media brand. Furthermore, the community can be actively used to test ideas for stories, or it can be asked to contribute to the ideation of a magazine story. In this sense, the community is a resource for the editorial team in both the ideation and planning of contents.

Importantly, the bloggers *produce* the content of the online service. The role of the editorial team is, in cooperation with digital planners, to conceptualise, develop and maintain a platform for bloggers on which they can produce contents and wage discussions. The members of the editorial team provide direction for the bloggers, but they are not directly involved in the actual production, editing or finishing of the content. They support and mentor the bloggers by offering them tools

for the ideation and production of contents, including emotional support and encouragement. This kind of coaching and support provided by media professionals helps the bloggers create more interesting contents.

The editorial team tries deliberately to get the community to contribute to the *marketing* of the service and to get them to 'recommend the brand'. One of the principles steering the process of content production by the editorial team is that the contents must be interesting and shareable. However team members are adamant that these contents must not appear too promotional in nature, but rather that they are easy to approach and share. Contents designed to market the service cannot be too 'commercial' or 'aggressive'.

In practice there is no functional difference between the *distribution* and marketing of contents. The distribution of contents is at once a process of marketing the service: 'All the contents that we share is brand marketing.' Content distribution means two things from a marketing point of view: first of all, the distribution of good content creates good notions and images of the service, and secondly, it generates favourable word-of-mouth about the service.

The editorial staff is committed to fostering a community spirit, a sense of belonging. Their role is thus to promote the brand and to create cohesion and togetherness in the audience community. Interestingly, the team has developed detailed guidelines and practices for building up the right kind of spirit in the community. It considers itself responsible for developing and maintaining the community's 'brand voice'. Thus, brand building is part of the editorial team's job, not something intended for the marketing department alone. It is increasingly difficult to distinguish between content production and marketing. These are in many respects overlapping activities: after all,

contents contribute to marketing the service. In traditional journalistic products it is usually quite clear what is edited content and what is commercial content, but in online services the logic of commercialism is different. Online practices and business models are in many respects different from those in traditional magazines. At the same time commercialism is an increasingly visible part of the media product itself.

The involvement of the audience community in *developing* the service is focused most particularly on service usability. Community members send in a lot of feedback that the editorial team can use in *renewing* the service. For instance, when the service was launched, users contributed actively to developing the service concept. The editorial team has also conducted online polls to find out what kinds of features users need and want from the service.

The role of editorial team members is to constantly work to renew and develop the online service and community. Furthermore, their role is to create an atmosphere that inspires a deeper commitment to the community among its members. The willingness of community members to develop the service depends crucially on their sense of ‘ownership’ of the online service. When they feel that they have a real chance to influence the service and the community, they are also prepared to invest their time in developing them.

The results and discussion

The aim of this article is to answer the question, what does co-creative collaboration between media organisations and audience communities mean and involve? The main contribution of our study is the model of co-creative collaboration in media work. In this section we present the model, which is based on

the data-driven analysis presented, and discuss its dimensions through the literature on co-creation. Based on the case studies we propose that co-creative collaboration between media organisations and audience communities can be dissected and understood with the help of the model.

Figure 1: The model of co-creative collaboration in media work

PLACE FIGURE 1. HERE

The model of co-creative collaboration in media work breaks down into three main segments or categories describing the key processes of collaboration. These are *development*, *production* and *marketing*. Each of these categories is further divided into two parts describing the main stages of media work (*renewal-ideation*, *planning-execution*, *promotion-distribution*). Together, these dimensions describe the modes of co-creative collaboration in media work between the editorial team and the audience.

In the model, the category of *development* comprises, firstly, processes of *renewal*, which refer to the community's involvement in developing the media brand, the service concept and the products. For instance, audience communities are actively involved in developing an online service and its user interface. Secondly, this category comprises processes of *ideation*, which refer to the community's involvement in contributing new ideas for contents produced by the media brand. This involvement in ideation takes both the form of the community proactively contacting the editorial team about subjects they think warrant attention, and the editorial team analysing discussions in the media brand's online site and picking up new ideas.

Whereas in the traditional model of mass communication, the media companies created and developed media brands, service concepts and products without any consumer involvement, value is now increasingly created by cultivating the activities of media consumer communities. According to Couldry (2009: 438), 'mere' consumers or audience members, have become less common in their pure form, while hybrid sender/receivers are now more prevalent. The successful operation of the media industry is in fact as much about media production as it is about facilitating the maintenance of social connections with and within the audience communities (Marshall, 2009). In particular, the desire to build brand loyalty is a strong motive for creating a sense of community among the audience of a media outlet (Vujnovic, 2011: 145). It is vital that in the audience community, or media brand community, there is a strong sense of ownership of the media brand, and thereby the community members are eager to contribute to the development of the services and contents of the media brand.

The category of *production* comprises the processes of planning and execution. *Planning* refers to the collaboration between the editorial staff and the community in designing new contents, and execution refers to their collaboration in putting these contents into practice. The community contributes to the planning of contents, for instance, through surveys in which users are asked about how they think a given subject should be approached or what questions should be asked of interviewees. The community is involved in content production and *execution* both by independently creating content and by sending raw material to the editorial team for processing.

The interweaving of the practices of media companies and the audience has been expressed by using such concepts as prosumerism/prosumer (Toffler, 1980) and produsage/produser (Bruns, 2012) where the emphasis is on the competence of the audience in producing content. However, our analysis demonstrates that the participation of the audience in media practices is more complex than these bipolar terms suggest

(van Dijck, 2009: 42). It is important to note that co-creation is a partly distinct form of collaboration from co-production (Ballantine and Varey 2008: 12). Co-production is more oriented towards the goods-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Payne et al., 2007: 84), thereby engaging consumers in practices aimed at creating concrete products and content. Co-creation, by contrast, is not only about collaboration in the production of media content, as it also involves collaboration that relies on interpersonal links among the audience, such as when distributing content in social media.

The category of *marketing* comprises two separate but intertwined processes: promotion and distribution. The process of *promotion* refers to different ways of enhancing the appeal of the media brand and service. *Distribution* refers to working together with the community to distribute contents in the social media and in this way increasing awareness of the media brand, its contents and service.

Consumers can assist with the marketing of media products in a variety of ways, ranging from online word-of-mouth endorsements to integrating brand-related contents into their communication in social networks (Napoli, 2010: 512). Our model emphasises how the distribution of media content by the audience is also an important marketing practice. Online audience communities as networks have an increasingly prominent role in distributing content produced by media companies (Villi, 2012; Hermida et al., 2012; Bechmann, 2012). In fact, several media scholars have argued that for contemporary media corporations it is more important to engage, encourage and assist consumers in the circulation and distribution of media content than it is to have them participate in content production (Singer et al. 2011; Hermida et al. 2012).

It is becoming ever harder to describe media companies by using traditional industry concepts and definitions. For example, the media companies in our case studies have been involved in the business of

magazine publishing. Now, they are evolving into multichannel media brands and platforms and, thus, can no longer be called ‘magazines’ or ‘magazine companies’. The ongoing integration of media sectors means it is no longer adequate to refer to a specific ‘media industry’ in the same sense as before (e.g. Albarran, 2010: 83; Küng, 2008: 7, 47; Hess, 2014). Our case studies well illustrate the changes that are sweeping the media industry: as a result of digitalisation and changing consumer habits many media companies are having to reassess their business strategies and to rethink their future sources of income. The concept of ‘media work’ is being similarly affected by the continuing convergence of media professionals’ job descriptions (e.g. Deuze, 2007).

Conclusion

In this article, we have explored processes of co-creation in the media industry and media work. Based on two empirical case studies, we have categorised six modes of co-creative collaboration between media brands’ editorial teams and audience communities. These analyses have provided the basis for our model of co-creative collaboration, which in the future can act as a framework for analysing co-creative processes in media work.

In our two case studies, the audience communities took part both in the production of content and maintaining productive interpersonal connections. The editorial teams of the two media brands nurtured and facilitated the communicative activities of the audience communities, which, importantly, are indispensable for the success and even the existence of the media brands. This is a prime example of co-creation: according to the interviewees, the media brands would have no chance to prosper without their active audience communities. Indeed, much of the work of the editorial teams involved communicating with the audience communities, personally assisting community members and making efforts to create

and maintain a communal feel-good atmosphere. The process covered all three segments of co-creative collaboration in media work that we have indicated: production, development and marketing.

Based on our analysis and previous research (e.g. Thurman, 2008; Bechmann and Lomborg, 2013), it can be concluded that co-creative processes between media professionals and audience communities have a definite impact on everyday media work. For example, the work of editorial teams is transformed from content production through creating platform concepts to coordinating, managing and nurturing networks and audience communities. Editors-in-chief and managing editors, for instance, will in practice have the job of managing creative communities and networks of users, partners and subcontractors. Marketing and branding also have increasing significance in the work of journalists.

We state that the model we have developed can provide a sound basis for new theoretical and empirical studies on media management. It can also be adapted to developing practices of media management and strategy work in media companies. Managers and editors can use the model to estimate what modes of co-creative collaboration with audience communities are open to them in conceptualising and developing new contents, platforms and services. A key aspect in this regard is the question of how they can engage audience members in creating and maintaining a sense of community and ownership of the media brand.

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FIGURE 1.