

Becoming a Media Professional: Building Identity and Values in Social Media Production

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Executive Summary

This research analyses the professional identity development of media professionals in social media, with particular emphasis on the experiences of Gabriela Fannia, a Social Media Producer at ABC Melbourne. It highlights the importance of communication, leadership, and personal storytelling in addition to technical skills, arguing that professional identity is shaped by both individual and institutional factors. The report discusses the evolving nature of media work, the role of lifelong learning, and how personal values and institutions values shapes one's professional identity. The key recommendations include excelling communication, collaboration, and leadership skills and having the mindset of always learning to thrive in the media industry.

Introduction

This report delves into the topic of how a strong and values-driven professional identity is formed and performed within the evolving media landscape with digital platforms at its centre. The meaning of becoming a professional in the field of social media production will be explored through insights drawn from an interview with Gabriela, a Social Media Producer at ABC Melbourne, and contextualised by theoretical perspectives on media work and identity. By examining Gabriela's personal career journey, personal and institutional values, and individual practices, this report clarifies how professional identity in this sector is formed, internalised, and demonstrated. The objective of this report is to provide students and recent graduates with insight into building a career in this dynamic industry with purpose, integrity, and leadership.

Discussion

1. Career Journey & Professional Identity

Mastery is a momentary illusion, especially in fields that evolve as rapidly as media and communications. Scanlon (2011) suggests the idea of lifelong learning where individuals remain open to learning and doing things differently as they grow into their roles; because professions in the media field continue to change around us, and this professional identity cannot be built on technical proficiency alone. In this sense, professional identity is not something we achieve once and for all, but something we grow into through continuous learning, adaptation, and reflection. This was reflected in Gabriela's journey into journalism and social media production. Starting with a Bachelor of Media Communication with a specialisation in Screen and Film studies and later pursuing a Master of Journalism at Monash University, her decision allowed her to build practical skills and discover her personal values.

Throughout her academic journey, Gabriela gained hands-on experience and build foundation in different sectors by participating in various internships that ranged from marketing agencies to non-profit organisations. She landed her first job in the media industry at Channel Nine, where she began to apply her skills in a real newsroom setting. Gabriela later transitioned to ABC Melbourne, where she now works as a Social Media Producer and Journalist. Each role she undertook contributes to her sense of identity as a media professional.

In addition to that, Bassot (2015) points out the importance of critical reflection to help professionals grow, learn from their experiences, and adapt effectively. Gabriela's story reinforces that in today's media landscape, success comes from being open to growth and learning, not from assuming one has all the answers. Through critical reflection she identified which values she wished to bring forward in her work. Her academic and industry experiences

helped her understand that journalism was not just about reporting facts but shaping narratives that empower communities.

2. Skills, Values & Professional Mindset

Gabriela identifies several core values that are integral to the way she works, including collaboration and communication. She believes that no one can excel in all aspects of a newsroom, but clear communication and collaboration enable team members to enhance each other's work.

In her work at ABC, communication becomes a vehicle for collaboration allowing the team to work together towards a common goal. These values are strongly upheld and reinforced by editorial guidelines, regular feedback loops, and an inclusive organisational culture as she mentioned on the interview. These institutional structures foster collaboration across teams, allowing for shared ownership of media content.

Gabriela contrasts this with her earlier role at Channel Nine, where she worked more independently, reflecting how organisational cultures vary and shape expectation. Yet, her ability to adapt to the situation with her existing technical and communication skills across these setting points to a strong sense of professional self-awareness. As Malmelin and Villi (2017) notes, media work today must be understood through value networks, co-creative spaces where companies, partners, and professionals work closely together.

3. Leadership, Ethics, and Personal Voice in Storytelling

In addition to the technical skills and personal values discussed, she also identifies leadership as an essential quality for anyone working in the media industry. "You need the leadership skill to hold ownership for your own content," she explains, "but also to guide your team members and make your project better." This concept of leadership goes beyond managing people, it involves taking ownership of one's own work, while also helping others elevate their contributions to a project. By embracing leadership, Gabriela takes responsibility not only for the content she creates but also for how it contributes to broader conversations, particularly those that address underrepresented voices and issues.

One such story Gabriela is particularly proud of is her reporting on women's safety in public transport. Drawing on her own personal experiences, she brought a unique perspective to the topic, amplifying the voices of women from minority groups. "I used my own story that I thought might be impactful," Gabriela said. "Bringing a story from a minority to the broader public was something I'm proud of because it had a real impact." By infusing her stories with personal experience and values, while still following the editorial standards and values that ABC has, she creates more authentic and compelling content that resonates with a wider audience.

4. From Student to Professional

Transitioning into a media professional means embracing growth, reflection, and values-driven practice. Gabriela's journey showed me that developing professional identity isn't just about skills, but also about clarity, confidence, and purpose. Personally, I've learned to reflect on my values, seek feedback, and contribute meaningfully to collaborative spaces. My next steps include building more industry connections, excelling my leadership skill, refining my voice through content creation, and embracing lifelong learning as part of my identity. By staying curious and intentional, I aim to become a professional who not only communicates effectively but tells meaningful stories grounded in inclusivity, integrity, and respect.

Conclusion

Gabriela Fannia's career reflects the continuous evolution of professional identity in the media industry. Her ability to reflect, adapt, and uphold shared values like inclusivity, integrity, and respect shows how professional identity is continuously shaped by both individual agency and institutional contexts. Ultimately, becoming a media professional means committing to lifelong learning, not only to grow, but to create impact that matters.

References

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LinkedIn Post

What does it really mean to be 'ready' for the industry?

It's a question that's been sitting with me as I prepare to graduate. In an industry that's always evolving, where creativity meets speed, and storytelling meets strategy, what does it *actually* take to stand out?

I recently got the opportunity to speak with Gabriela Fannia, an ABC Australia social media producer, whose experience provided more context than just guidance. I gained perspective from it. She made no mention of being the most technical or skilled. Rather, she discussed the value of communication, leadership, and flexibility; about taking ownership of your story in a way that is consistent with your values and identity, rather than in a performative manner.

That conversation really reframed how I see professional identity. It goes beyond only having the technical skills. It's more complex, it involves how you collaborate with others, how you adjust, and how you 'lead' yourself and others. The little, deliberate ways you show up are what count. As a student, I've often measured readiness in terms of technical output, campaigns completed, tools mastered, briefs delivered. The introspective side, however, when you stop and consider why your job matters, how it impacts others, and what sort of communicator you want to be, is something I hadn't really addressed. That's the gap I've started to understand, the one between where I am and where I want to be. I'm still learning to trust my voice. Still navigating how to balance confidence with humility. But I also recognise that this space, this in-between, is where growth happens.

To bridge that gap, I've been focusing on projects that challenge me beyond execution. In my present role as president of a Monash cultural club (Indonesian Student Association), I've had to organise, lead with empathy, work across boundaries, and create spaces for others to grow with me. To improve my storytelling and writing abilities and to put myself out there, I've also started writing for a magazine run by Monash called Esperanto.

In the future, I want to make a significant contribution to the media, not merely work in it. My goal is to establish a profession in public relations and strategic communication where my principles guide my collaboration and leadership.

So maybe being "ready" for the industry doesn't mean having all the answers. Perhaps it's about being more deliberate in our development as the professionals we want to be and asking better questions.

I'd love to know what you think if you're in the media sector or going through a student-to-professional transition: How did you handle the transition from school to the working world?

And as you develop your own professional identity, what are the main aspects you are focusing on?