

The Modern Editor Podcast – Episode 21: Will ChatGPT Replace Editors and Authors?

Tara Whitaker: [0:03] Welcome to *The Modern Editor Podcast*, where we talk about all things editing and what it's like to run an editorial business in today's world. I'm your host, Tara Whitaker. Let's get to it.

Tara Whitaker: [0:18] Hello. Welcome to today's episode. We are going to be talking about ChatGPT. It's a hot topic of the moment, and I've seen a lot of panic and chatter about it. So, I figured we needed to have a little discussion.

Tara Whitaker: [0:34] So, ChatGPT (at least this version) is very new. So anytime something new or AI-related comes out there, there's always this doomsday talk and fear about how it's going to replace all of our jobs. And to be honest, I mean, let's be real, those fears are valid. But I think after our initial reactions of panic, it's important to do our due diligence and learn more about the topic that, you know, is a—is coming out or is being talked about before we truly get concerned. I know that it's natural to panic. But hopefully after today, some of that panic will be eased a bit. And along with the panic, I've also seen a lot of excitement about it from lots of different industries, including editing.

Tara Whitaker: [1:22] So, I initially started out with the intention of this episode to be about why or how ChatGPT and AI-generated content affects the editing and writing industries, which we will talk about. But what I also ended up doing was learning way more about the ethical “stuff” about it. Because as an editor, we work with words and ChatGPT produces words. So, my question that I had from the very beginning was, Where are these words coming from? And that led me down a rabbit hole. So, we're going to talk today. We're going to give you an introduction into what ChatGPT is, how it works, how it can be used, and, of course, how it affects editors and authors. Now, this will by no means be an extensive, deep dive into it, because this topic is brand new, it's ever-changing. And, like I said, I already went down a major rabbit hole researching, and I barely even scratched the surface. Like, it's so new. Everyone is learning. Everyone is putting their opinion out there. Just have to take a deep breath. And this will hopefully be enough to get you thinking. And I'm gonna be taking a lot of deep breaths during this episode, because it's gonna get a little heated from my end. I get a little passionate when I talk about ethics and such. And there's gonna be a lot of that today—head's up. So, let's dive in.

Tara Whitaker: [2:52] A little disclaimer (as always) at the beginning—I am not a software developer or a data scientist or a copyright attorney or an expert in ChatGPT by any means. And I don't want you to think that any of this content that we talk about is meant to be advice or coming from a place of expertise, because it is not. I am a modern editor, so I know how to do my research. And I know how to find reputable sources and also know how to ask my husband (whose job is somewhat adjacent to all of this AI stuff). So, I also purchased an hour-long webinar training from Julie Hall about ChatGPT that I'm going to link in the show notes that can give you a more in-depth

overview of what it's all about. I will say that her training is definitely coming from a place of excitement. And I'll be honest, this podcast episode comes from a little less excitement. So be aware of that difference. But I'll include the link to that training and also all of the links to the sources I use and mention during this episode. They'll all be in the show notes, and they'll be at tarawhitaker.com/episode-21.

Tara Whitaker: [4:13] I'm also going to share some of the content that ChatGPT produced when I asked it the questions that I was using to test it out to prepare for this episode. And I'm not going to read all of them on here because that would be very long, but I am going to read some of it because it's pertinent to driving home the point and showing you what it can do. So, if you prefer to skip ahead on those or just read it in the transcript, that's completely fine. But I do recommend reading the additional content that it came up with on my show notes because it's interesting. It's very interesting.

Tara Whitaker: [4:55] Okay, here is where we get into it. What the heck is ChatGPT? So, it is called a conversational AI tool. And what I read in one article was it works like predictor text a bit. So, if you have Gmail or use Google Docs and have this turned on, you can see how it works where you're typing a sentence, and it will predict what you want to say next. And you can just tab to agree with that. It's a bit like that. So, it's a very simple website, you type in a question or a prompt, and it generates content for you related to whatever you asked it to. You can also ask it to clarify or give different examples or try something else. You can kind of have a conversation with it to get to the results that you're looking for. So, you have to be really good about asking questions because it's AI and it can only respond to, you know, those few words that you ask it to. It doesn't have the nuance—isn't able to translate at this point—necessarily, what you're going for. So, you have to be really specific and clear on your questions.

Tara Whitaker: [6:09] This version of ChatGPT launched at the end of November 2022. And it's completely blown up so much so that right now, in February 2023, you have to wait sometimes to be even allowed to get into the site because there's such high traffic to it. I've seen where it's taken hours for some people. I had to wait about 20 minutes the first time I used it, and then after that, it's been very quick. So, it could be just the time that I—the times that I tried to get into it weren't very high traffic. But if you do give this a go, don't be surprised if you have to wait to get into the website. Right now, it's free. And it's in, you know, that beta experiment mode. But I'm going to assume that it's going to be behind a paywall at some time in the future. There's no way this will be free forever. No way.

Tara Whitaker: [7:04] ChatGPT was created by a company called OpenAI. OpenAI was founded by Elon Musk. A little fun fact there. I'll let you interpret that how you will. OpenAI is also responsible for the image-based AI tool. You might have heard about that. I think it happened at the end of last year, so 2022. It definitely made its rounds on social media with people creating their own AI-generated images. And that has its own controversies, which we're not going to talk about today; we're going to focus more on the words part, but if you're interested, have a little Google and you'll find lots of content about it. And last, just an FYI, Microsoft owns 49% of ChatGPT. So that's just the, the basic information.

Tara Whitaker: [7:58] Now, what can you use ChatGPT for? And to be honest, the possibilities seem pretty endless. I have looked at examples ranging from people using it to create blog posts, newsletters, social media captions, outlines, sales pages for their products and services, website copy. And yes, I have seen talk about novel outlines and actually writing novels. Now, obviously, for us, that's interesting. In my experience using it, I think it can be helpful getting you unstuck or get you in the flow of writing, kind of like using it as an idea generator. And people have also used it to name things like their courses and programs. So. Writing a novel? Ehhh. I know. It makes sense because, come to find out, ChatGPT scrapes content from books to generate its content, which we're going to talk about in a little bit. So, I can't— I'm sure there will be novels written with ChatGPT. I don't know if they will be read by the masses. It takes all of the emotion and human element out of it by writing with, with a machine. I jus— I hesitate with that big time.

Tara Whitaker: [9:32] But, of course what do I do to think about it? I asked ChatGPT to write a romance novel outline for me, and I put in: write a romance novel outline about two enemies who get stranded in a small town and only one bed is available. We all know the one-bed trope. I did this twice, using the same query, and I essentially got the same thing, but it was worded a little bit differently. And just to give you a brief explanation, it broke it down into six sections, the outline. It did: introduction, tension and conflict, understanding and empathy, romance, the future, and epilogue and reflection. And to just give you another little example, for the romance section, this is the the advice it gave. "Number one: show two characters falling in love and overcoming their differences. Number two: have them engage in romantic activities in the small town such as ice skating, hot cocoa by the fire, and stargazing. And number three: describe their passion and the way they make each other feel revealing their love for each other."

Tara Whitaker: [10:44] So, I think based on that, I'm gonna go out on a limb here and say, authors, you're safe. I don't think ChatGPT is going to replace you anytime soon. It's, I mean, it's just lacking, right? It's lacking in many different areas. And I also, like I said, I included the full outline on the show notes that you can go in and really read what it entailed. And I will note, the first time I did it, it was—the characters' names were Rachel and something else like John. And the second time, it's Sophia and Jake. So, take that how you will in terms of coming up with diverse character names. I don't know, you know, where— Well, hold on. I know where it's pulling from, but I'm not sure how it decides what to pull. So that's just a little side note there.

Tara Whitaker: [11:43] Here's the deep breath, cause here we go. Where does the content come from? Where is ChatGPT pulling this content? This is where the meat of the podcast episode is. And more like salty beef because I'm a little salty about this. Actually, no I'm a lot salty about this. I am very salty. So, to start out, I asked ChatGPT. I asked it where does it get its content from. And this is what it said: "ChatGPT is a language model developed by OpenAI, which uses deep learning techniques to generate human-like text. The model is trained on a large corpus of text from the internet, which includes a wide range of topics, including news articles, websites, books, and social media posts. This corpus provides the model with a diverse set of examples, allowing it to generate text that is coherent and informative." First of all, bleh! Like,

gobbledygook much? Second of all, obviously, the thing that stood out to me was books. I was just like, wait a minute. I didn't think books was included in this. So, I did some digging, and I made my husband help me because I obviously wanted to dig into this. So, here's what we found. Or I should say he found. He found this link, which again is in the show notes so you can see exactly where I'm getting this content from.

Tara Whitaker: [13:10] ChatGPT pulls from something called Books 1 and Books 2. And these are mysteries, essentially. I think they're like databases, but OpenAI hasn't disclosed what they are, which is a bit of a red flag for me. Why don't you disclose that? Anyways, so after some digging, we figured out that Books 1 is, I guess—we're guessing here, or people are guessing that—it consists of free books scraped from smashwords.com. And Books 2 is suspected to be LibGen, or Library Genesis, which, in a nutshell, provides free access to paywalled, copyrighted content. This is where the salt comes in.

Tara Whitaker: [13:58] So again, I refer back to ChatGPT and I put in: Is Books 1 unethical? Here's what it said. Now, this is a little lengthy, but I had to—I have to include it. “The ethics of Books 1 is similar to that of Library Genesis, as it also is—it is also a platform for distributing copyrighted materials without permission from the copyright owners. While free access to books and other copyrighted materials can be seen as a valuable resource for education and research, the distribution of these materials without the permission of the copyright owners is generally considered to be unethical. In many countries, it is also illegal. Copyright owners have taken legal action against sites like Books 1 in an attempt to stop the unauthorized distribution of their materials, and the operators of these sites have had to take steps to evade legal action and maintain the availability of their platforms. Whether or not the use of Books 1 is ethical is a matter of personal opinion, and users should be aware of the legal and ethical implications of accessing and using copyrighted materials without permission. It is ultimately up to each individual to determine what they believe is right, and to act in accordance with their personal values and beliefs.”

Tara Whitaker: [15:16] Really? Really. So going off of that, I wanted to dig into Smashwords, because I've, I'm obviously aware of the site. I've read stuff on the site, but I don't, you know, I'm not well-versed in their terms and conditions. So, I looked at their terms and conditions, and I found the following three things that stood out. Number one: “The copyright in the work shall belong to the author or the party the author cites as the copyright holder.” Number two, pertaining to free works: “Free works and sample works published at Smashwords are the copyrighted material of the author or publisher, and therefore are not authorized for redistribution without prior written consent from Smashwords.” And number three: “End users agree to not copy, modify, or distribute content from the site or Smashwords, copyrights and trademarks.” So, with that, did Smashwords give consent to ChatGPT? There's gotta be some loophole, right? How is this even legal?

Tara Whitaker: [16:28] Again, I asked ChatGPT. Here's the crap they spewed out at me. “As a language model created by OpenAI, I don't have access to information on specific agreements the company may have with other organizations. However, OpenAI

is known for using a diverse range of text data from a variety of sources to train its language models. It's possible that OpenAI has an agreement with Smashwords for the use of their books in the training process, but I don't have access to that information." I don't even know where to go from there. This seems, this just doesn't seem right. Right?

Tara Whitaker: [17:06] So, one last thing, because Books 1 is Smashwords supposedly, and Books 2 is Library Genesis, so I typed into ChatGPT: Is LibGen unethical? And this is what it said, in part because it was basically the same thing that it spewed out for Books 1: "The ethics of Library Genesis is a matter of debate. On one hand, it is a source of free access to a vast collection of academic articles, books, and other copyrighted materials, which many people view as a valuable resource for education and research. On the other hand, it is a platform for distributing copyrighted material without permission from the copyright owners, which many people consider to be unethical." This is all sketchy AF to me. This does not jibe with my values and my ethics and my morals.

Tara Whitaker: [18:00] So, this is what I mean by I started this research, seeing how it was going to replace or not replace editors and authors. And I've totally veered off into the ethical stuff around this. Like, it's not even a question of whether it's going to take our jobs, it's is this even freakin' ethical in the first place? I, I was dumbfounded to be honest. I don't understand how this is working. If it seems to be producing content based off of copyrighted material that the copyright owner has not given permission to use, how is this possible? I'm not a lawyer. There's gotta be some loophole, right? Or is this just super illegal? I don't, I don't understand. If someone understands, please tell me. I have looked far and wide. I don't get it. I don't get it. Okay. Deep breath.

Tara Whitaker: [18:58] Enough of that for now. I will say when I was looking through where else ChatGPT gets its content from along with these sketchy databases or whatever we're calling them, it also scrapes URLs from Reddit submissions. And it uses the content that it's being asked to produce. So, it's learning as it goes. So, the more people that use it, you know, in theory, the better it's going to get. Also, this content is by no means 100% accurate, it admits it. And it can sound ridiculous. It's very repetitive, I found. So, if you are an editor who points out close repetition or echoes, you would have a very fun time with ChatGPT content because it is so repetitive. Okay, that's where the content comes from.

Tara Whitaker: [19:50] Now, where do we have permission to use this AI-generated content? Great question. As of right now, there's no usage restrictions. None. We all know that technology goes way faster than the law. And this is yet another instance of that. So right now, it's a free-for-all. Is it ethical? That's something you have to answer yourself. For me, the answer is no. But everybody's gonna have a different boundary. Everybody's gonna have a different opinion. And I respect that. But legally, it is okay to use this content right now. Does legal equal ethical? Not necessarily. And to go off of the ethical piece, I'm also linking to a *Time* investigation story about a company, or about how OpenAI worked with a company based in Kenya, that— It's absolutely atrocious. That's the long and short of it. It was—the company was used to help make

ChatGPT not as violent, sexist, or racist as its predecessor called GPT-3. So, you can imagine the type of content that these workers were exposed to regularly, and the mental health issues they are now suffering from because of it. Please be very cautious before reading the article. It has very disturbing content. But I read it and was just absolutely appalled. And it makes me never want to look at ChatGPT again. Like, it's despicable.

Tara Whitaker: [21:37] So, the lesson here is do your research. You know, some of us (including myself), we hear ChatGPT, and we go—*Oh, it's gonna take our jobs as editors, or No more copywriters!* And we freak out about us, right? Because we're humans, we're a bit selfish. But as modern editors, we need to do our research. And it is, you know, there is something to be said about it taking over our jobs. That's a legitimate fear. But look at all the stuff that I uncovered by simply googling and looking at reputable sources. I am no longer concerned at all about it replacing me because, quite frankly, I think this is a whole bunch of bullshit. Pardon my language. I'm so irritated and mad, and blah! That's where the saltiness comes in.

Tara Whitaker: [22:30] So, another deep breath. There we go. Okay. I've got a little bit more here. How do we disclose if something was written with AI assistance? And/or are we obligated to share that information? Great questions; more ethical decisions. Right now, to my knowledge, there are no laws or anything that states that you have to disclose if you are using ChatGPT. I did get a newsletter the other day that had a disclosure in it that said that they used ChatGPT to help generate the content. That's not required by anything or anybody right now. You know, it's not like GDPR or anything like that.

Tara Whitaker: [23:13] So, are we obligated ethically to disclose that? Should we? Should we put that in our social media captions or our blog posts or our newsletters or our novels? Should our author clients disclose that to the editors? Do editors need to be running content through a plagiarism checker now? Even novels? If the content is copyrighted that ChatGPT is using, and an author uses that content to write their novel, can the author get in trouble? Can the editor also get in trouble? Is it, you know, it's all these questions? Right? And I have no answers. I don't know if anybody does right now. But it's food for thought. Right? And I don't say that to be terrifying or to, you know, freak out or anything like that. Just be aware of it. This is so constantly changing right now. And the best we can do is try to stay on top of it, and be aware of it, which is why I'm here to help you do that.

Tara Whitaker: [24:17] Ah, lots of questions. Lots of questions. But the last question we'll cover, the whole point of why I started going down this route on the episode is, will editors and authors become obsolete? Are we going to be replaced by ChatGPT? Hell to the no. We're— No. No. And I realized that this conversation hasn't been the most light-hearted or fun, but this is the—this is the light. This is the positive news. I can't predict the future, you know, I have limited knowledge on AI. But as of right now, I cannot imagine this replacing editors and authors. I just can't. I can see how some editors and authors might want to use this to help with ideas, like I said before, but oh my goodness, the content it produces is so dry, so devoid of personality, so repetitive,

it's not unique in any way. And let's not even forget the whole ethical and legal implications that can possibly come along with it in the future. There are lawsuits filed against it. Of course there are, and there are going to be more.

Tara Whitaker: [25:27] We haven't even touched on how do you use it in schools and universities? How do you use it to pass exams or write dissertations? Dissertations—editors do work on those. There's so much unknown right now. And all I can say with certainty is it's just going to keep changing. So again, I referred to ChatGPT because I was curious to see what it said. And I am going to read this, and it is slightly long, but bear with me. What I asked it: Will ChatGPT replace freelance editors? And here's what it said: "It is unlikely that AI language models like me will completely replace freelance editors. While AI models like me can perform various language-related tasks such as generating text, answering questions, and even editing text to a certain extent, human editors bring a level of creativity and nuance and critical thinking to the editing process that AI models are not yet capable of. Additionally, human editors are able to understand context and apply judgment to determine what changes should be made to a text, while AI models like me are limited to the information and instructions provided by the data used to train them. That being said, AI language models like me can certainly aid freelance editors in their work by providing suggestions for corrections and improvements and can also be used as a tool for pre-editing text before it is reviewed by a human editor. In the future, as AI technology continues to develop and advance, it's possible that AI models like me will play an increasingly larger role in the editing process, but it is unlikely that they will completely replace human editors."

Tara Whitaker: [27:12] Hmm. I also put it in there again, put that same query in there and got the same response essentially. But this one did say something a little different. And it said, they have a deep understanding of different writing styles, formats, and tone, and can help writers to refine their content to meet the needs of their target audience. So, what do you think about that? I actually agree with a lot of that. We can bring nuance and critical thinking and we can ensure that the author's voice and style is retained. Right now, ChatGPT cannot do that. But can it in the future? Who knows. Who knows? I don't know if it will ever be good enough to replace us. But I think I'll say this, I think we're safe for now.

Tara Whitaker: [28:00] But I did see where it said the pre-edit text before you send it to an editor, which intrigued me because I kind of see that as Grammarly too. You know, Grammarly is certainly hit or miss, but it can be a tool to use, you know, if you don't have the means or the access to an editor. So, I tested ChatGPT, and I put "Correct the grammar in this sentence: I is a freelance editor that works on novels." And it came back with "The correct grammar for the sentence is: I am a freelance editor who works on novels." So, it was correct; it was able to change that. There's gonna be limitations of course, but I can see that being helpful for authors to use in their self-editing process.

Tara Whitaker: [28:47] And then I got a little cocky and was like, oh, well, let's see how it can do this. I put in "Make this sentence sound funnier: The movie is boring." This is what it came up with. "Buckle up, Buttercup. This movie is more boring than watching

paint dry on a snail's back.” [Laughing] Uh, yeah. I'm gonna leave you with that and say editors and authors, we're not being replaced anytime soon. We're just not, okay?

Tara Whitaker: [29:20] Okay, I know that was a ton of information. A little ranting, a little swearing. But hopefully you got some new info for you to ponder. Digest. Think about. I don't think the discussion around AI and ChatGPT and ethics is going to end anytime soon. It's only going to become more prevalent. And so, we as editors just need to be aware of what's going on and the latest trends and the latest ethical things around it. And I hope between listening here and taking a look at the sources that are in the show notes and the examples that you have a better idea of what ChatGPT is, how authors and editors can use it, if you want to use it, the potential issues, the potential benefits of it. And I hope above all, it gives you some reassurance that our jobs are currently safe. If I read an author say, “Buckle up, Buttercup, this movie is more boring than watching paint dry on a snail's back...” Um, yeah.

Tara Whitaker: [30:30] Okay, I would love, love, love to hear your thoughts, though, because I know that there are so many opinions out there. And I want to be sure that my sources are credible, like I've done the research that, to my knowledge they are, but if you have any other credible sources to either add, or to refute anything I've discussed, please, please share them with me. The last thing I want to do is give out any misinformation, or something incorrect without knowing. That would be terrible. You know, I'm an editor, not a data scientist. So, please hit me with all of your credible sources if you have them. And I'd love to hear your thoughts too. What do you think? Does it align with your ethics? Do you think you will use it for anything? For social media? For blog posts? For novels? What do you think about all of this? I would love, love, love to hear. You can always email me at hello@tarawhitaker.com. And I know we are going to discuss this ongoing—ongoingly? I'm pretty sure that's not a word. We're going to be discussing this on an ongoing basis inside the Freelance Editors Club. So, if you want to join in on that conversation, we'd love to have you. You can go to tarawhitaker.com/club and get all of the details. One last deep breath. It's going to be okay. Editors. Authors. Until next time, keep learning, keep growing, and know that you've got this.

Tara Whitaker: [19:57] Thank you so much for tuning into today's episode. If you enjoy *The Modern Editor Podcast*, I would be so grateful if you left us a review over on iTunes. And as always, you can head to tarawhitaker.com to connect with me and stay in touch. We'll chat again soon.