

3-23-2011

# Mobilizing User-Generated Content for Canada's Digital Content Advantage

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## Citation of this paper:

McNally, Michael; Whippey, Caroline; and Wong, Lola, "Mobilizing User-Generated Content for Canada's Digital Content Advantage" (2011). *FIMS Presentations*. 11.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/fimspres/11>

# Mobilizing User-Generated Content for Canada's Digital Content Advantage

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# Presentation Outline

- Overview of research project and user-generated content (UGC)
- The three domains of UGC
  - Creative Content
  - Small Scale Tools
  - Collaborative Content
- Leveraging UGC
- Barriers to UGC
- Policy Implications

# The Project

- Part of SHRCC Knowledge Synthesis Grant program
- Examine current state of UGC and identify research gaps
- Aim is to leverage UGC as part of Canada's Digital Economy Strategy

# What is User-Generated Content?

- User-generated content (UGC) is voluntarily developed content created by individuals or groups
- UGC is developed, distributed, and consumed in a wide variety of media formats
- UGC content distributed through a variety platforms
- UGC is increasingly popular – half of the top ten internet sites in the world heavily rely on UGC (Facebook, YouTube, Blogger.com, Wikipedia and Twitter)

# Three Domains

We have divided UGC in to three domains:

- **Creative content**
  - Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr, and others)
- **Small scale tools**
  - Video games, virtual worlds, and mobile applications
- **Collaborative content**
  - Wikis, open source software, and other creative content that is authored by a group as opposed to an individual

# Project breakdown: Three major domains

<b>A. Creative Content</b>	<b>B. Small-scale tools</b>	<b>C. Collaborative</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• User-generated content is content created, developed, captured and put on display by a individual on an online platform.</li><li>• Content generated by individuals or small groups (not within virtual worlds, or gaming platforms)</li><li>• More specifically platforms such as YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, and Facebook.</li><li>• UGC where an individual (or small non-regulated group) is in control of creation of content and uploading it for delivery on a platform.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Small scale tools are tools, modifications, and applications that have been created by a user or group of users.</li><li>• Game modifications (mods), or add-ons,</li><li>• Mods, objects, or tools created for virtual worlds such as Second Life.</li><li>• User developed applications and tools for mobile devices, such as the iPhone or the Android system.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collaboratively created UGC is authored collectively and shared by a self-regulating group of contributors.</li><li>• OSS includes both open-source software and free/libre software</li><li>• Wikis such as wikipedia</li><li>• Government data sets can be provided by any level of government</li></ul>

# Creative Content

- Individually created content distributed through a one or more platforms
- Platforms range from individual websites or blogs to comments posted on websites or articles in zines
- Content can be on any subject, and is independent of the platform



# Creative Content

- Wide array of uploading resources available
- Successful sites integrate content creation, aggregation, distribution and consumption
- This content is often generated with an audience in mind
- Examples of popular repositories of creative content include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr

# Creative Content

- Lowered production costs and the internet as a distribution mechanism erode the traditional creator-consumer dichotomy
- UGC included traditional media forms (audio, video, text) and emerging formats such as virtual worlds and augmented reality
- UGC platforms without user fees and obtrusive advertising have proved quite successful

# Small Scale Tools: Game Modifications

- Wide variety of popular video games include UGC
- Two main types:
  - User Interface Customization
  - Game Conversion Modification
- Modifications can act as sociotechnical objects, managing gameplay, providing incentive, enabling play, or can incite frustration.



# Small scale Tools: Virtual World Modifications

- In Second Life (SL) over 99% of the objects are user generated
- Highly open ended: the limits are the imagination of the users – creations range from clothes and hair styles to libraries and nightclubs
- Users retain intellectual property rights over creations



# Small Scale Tools: Mobile Applications



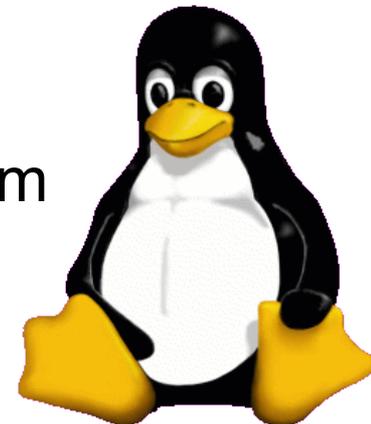
- Cellphone based applications an increasingly popular vehicle for UGC
- Most popular apps are games, news/weather apps, and social networking apps.
- Development requires a Software Development Kit, which may come at a monetary cost
- App stores provide a place for distribution

# Collaborative Content: Wikis

- Wikis are a special kind of webpage that facilitate collaborative authorship
- Best known wiki is Wikipedia though numerous other encyclopaedic wikis exist
- Wikis are not limited to encyclopaedias: Wiki City Guides has nearly 13 million pages, and is the largest wiki

# Collaborative Content: Open Source Software

- Open source software (OSS) contrasts with the propriety approach to software used by most major software companies
- Though prominent major OSS projects are produced and maintained by organizations, many OSS projects started as UGC
- Examples of OSS with UGC origins include the Apache Web Server and Linux Operating System



# Collaborative Content: Coordinating Collaboration

- Norm based governance central to collaborative UGC
- Leaders also play a central role in ensuring quality and version control
- Collaborative UGC is premised on the idea that the greater the number of contributors the better the quality of the output

# Leveraging UGC: Best Practices

- Successful UGC models integrate creation, distribution and consumption into a single tool
- User ratings and reviews are important for UGC platforms
- UGC creators often support each other through websites and forums
- Open (as opposed to proprietary) data sets and development tools encourage UGC production

# Leveraging UGC: Content Distribution

- Organization, indexing and disseminating UGC are central
- Discussion boards, forums, sites that review services or products, and some sites and blogs offer the ability to post comments and other small contributions
- Aggregation and distribution sites exist for other forms of UGC, and are equally critical in providing access to these forms. (ie: the App Bank, SourceForge, Curse.com)

# Leveraging UGC: Quality and Content Control

- Content repositories are useful for aggregating content but may contain material that is offensive or illegal in some jurisdictions
- More formalized agreements or contracts serve to enforce quality and content control form some types of UGC
  - In games/virtual worlds, private law contracts must be agreed to by the user before entering the space.
  - Proprietary control by platform owners (such as the iPhone) are a mechanism to ensure quality, but do limit creator freedom

# Leveraging UGC: Motivating Creative Activity

- UGC creators often derive personal enjoyment from creating and sharing their work
- Non-pecuniary motives such as developing a reputation are also important motivators
- Creating UGC can serve as a springboard to a professional career

# Leveraging UGC: Revenue Generation

- Four main sources of revenue for UGC creators:
  - Advertising revenue
  - Voluntary donations from other users
  - Direct payment/subscription fees, and the
  - Licensing of content to third parties
- Aggregation and distribution of UGC are relatively easily monetized
- Some collaborative UGC projects have gone on to spawn small but successful organizations.

# Barriers to UGC: Infrastructure and Skills

- UGC creation and distribution is reliant on fast, affordable internet access
- All collaborative UGC requires some basic level of technological literacy
- Creation of applications and software requires a greater knowledge of computer programming
- While UGC creation requires skills, it also enhances them

# Barriers to UGC: Private Ordering Mechanisms

- Closed, proprietary systems and formats limit users ability to freely make and distribute content
- Technological Protection Measures (TPMs) inhibit UGC production by making content inaccessible
- Use of content is also restricted through user licensing agreements; however, licensing schemes such as Creative Commons licensing can facilitate UGC production



# Barriers to UGC: Intellectual Property

- Intellectual property rights have a significant impact on UGC production and distribution
- Patents on the functions of software can restrict the types of OSS projects that can be produced
- Copyright is implicated in all forms of UGC
  - For originally authored pieces of UGC, the creator becomes the copyright owner
  - Copyrighted materials may also be used as inputs to create new pieces of UGC

# Barriers to UGC: Copyright

- The *Copyright Act* gives copyright owners the exclusive right to produce, reproduce, publish and transform a copyrighted work
- UGC creators must ensure that material taken from an existing work is licensed or such use is within the scope of a limitations or exception such as fair dealing
- Some copyright owners rigorously enforce their rights and view any use of their material as infringement

# Policy Implications: Allowing UGC to Flourish

- UGC adds not only economic value, but also enriches the cultural sphere
- Policy framework should aim to balance interests of creators and users
- Policymakers must create an environment innovative and creative UGC can flourish

# Policy Implications: International Reaction

- OECD recommends that digital content policies:  
“encourage a creative environment that stimulates market and non-market digital content creation, dissemination, and preservation of all kinds”
- European Union has studied UGC, but recommended no policy changes
- No attempt to address UGC in the United States

# Policy Implications: Privacy and Patent Law

- Privacy laws must ensure that creators can remain anonymous if they desire
- However, mechanisms must also exist to determine authorship if necessary
- Patent protection, in addition to copyright, for software is redundant and an unneeded encumbrance
  - This issues is particularly relevant in Canada, as the a recent Federal Court decision opens the door to software patents in Canada (*Amazon.com v. Canada*)

# Policy Implications: Copyright

- Copyright is the most important policy affecting UGC
- Copyright and licensing laws that facilitate the creation and protection of UGC must also allow the production of UGC from other source material
- Transformative uses of existing works need to be encouraged and viewed as adding value to the original material

# Policy Implications: Proposed UGC Exception

- The *Copyright Modernization Act* (Bill C-32) proposes an exception to copyright law for UGC production
- However, it is unclear how the stipulations that UGC must be non-commercial will be applied (is YouTube considered non-commercial?)
- More importantly, protection for TPMs in Bill C-32 render UGC exception nugatory

# Where Do We Go From Here?

- There are multiple areas of future research, including:
  - Motivations of creators and users of UGC
  - The provision of library and information services to users/creators of UGC
  - The information sources held by governments/public agencies
  - Intellectual property and other policy issues
  - Mobile applications
  - The use and development of small scale tools
  - Collaborative content: OSS and Wikis
  - the policy and technological infrastructures needed to mobilize and leverage UGC in Canada
  - The avenues for effective commercialization and monetization to gain the value generated by UGC (without hampering the energy and enthusiasm of end users: balancing mechanisms are crucial

# Acknowledgements

- We would like to thank SSHRC for funding the initial research and GRAND for some additional funding, as well as FIMS for the opportunity to present our research
- Our full report, *Mobilizing User-Generated Content for Canada's Digital Advantage* (2010) is available through Scholarship@Western  
<http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/fimspub/21/>
- These presentation slides will also be available on Scholarship@Western in the near future