

User-generated content

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Introduction

The technological progress over the past years has enabled large parts of the general public to access and afford new ways of interaction and communication via the internet's new intelligent web services and fast broadband connections. User-generated content (UGC) "is one of the main features of this so-called participative web"¹. UGC refers to different kinds of media content created and published by amateurs who have just been at the consuming end in the past. As there is no commonly agreed definition of UGC the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has proposed three main characteristics:

- Publication requirement
UGC has to be published in some context (e.g. on a website or on a social networking site).
- Creative effort
A "certain amount of creative effort [has to be] put into creating the work"¹. It is particularly important that "users [...] add their own value to the work"¹.
- Creation outside of professional routines and practices
Typically UGC is created without the "expectation of [...] remuneration"¹.

Areas of UGC

UGC appears in many forms on the internet as it is used in a broad variety of channels to grant information, views and media to other people.

The different content types text, images, audio, video, customer reviews/feedbacks, educational content, mobile content, virtual content as well as citizen journalism are offered via lots of distribution platforms such as blogs, wikis (text-based collaboration formats), feedback-allowing sites like Amazon.com, group-based aggregation like del.icio.us, podcasting, hosting sites like Youtube and Flickr, social networking sites like

¹ Wunsch-Vincent, Vickery (2007), p. 8.

Facebook, virtual worlds like Second Life, news sites and legal filesharing sites.

Empirical evidence

Wikipedia as the perfect example of a UGC-driven website shows an immense growth since its creation in 2001: Wikipedia is able "to collect and organize an unprecedented amount of knowledge using an open model"² as it hosts over 9.7 million articles in 256 languages.³ The English Wikipedia alone has a stake of over 2.3 million articles and over 7 million registered users.

Ochoas and Duvals quantitative analysis of UGC on Amazon.com⁴ shows that 82,365 User (Sources) contributed content to 3,100,671 Items.⁵ "The rule-of-thumb rule known as 'Participation Inequality' that suggest that 90% of the content is generated by 10% of the contributors"⁶ doesn't fit exactly in the case of amazon.com: 10% of the Users create about 50% of the content.⁷

Incentives

Contrary to the expectations one would normally have when it comes to incentives for providing and creating content, the users are generally not motivated by remuneration but by various different reasons:

- They enjoy being creative and want to entertain others.⁸
- They have a "desire [...] to express [themselves]"⁹, share experiences and document their lives.
- They want to be a part "of communities and collaborative projects"⁸ thereby making new friends and staying in touch with old ones.

² Johnson (2008), p. 2.

³ Cp. Johnson (2008), p. 2.

⁴ Users with more than 10 reviews were taken as a sample in the period of one week.

⁵ Cp. Duval, Ochoa (2008), p. 3.

⁶ Duval, Ochoa (2008), p. 6.

⁷ Cp. Duval, Ochoa (2008), p. 6.

⁸ Cp. Stoeckl, Rohrmeier, Hess (2007), p. 4.

⁹ Wunsch-Vincent, Vickery (2007), p. 14.

- “Lower costs and increased availability of tools for the creation of UCC (e.g. for creating, editing, hosting content)”⁸ are bringing down the entry barriers.

On the other hand there are commercial companies who are feared “of losing revenues due to decreased interest in traditional media forms”⁸. Therefore they are willing to invest large amounts of money in providing UGC frameworks and tools. Eventually they hope to generate revenues through advertising and by increasing customer loyalty.

Future trends

As the underlying technology is so rapidly developing one can see some fields of further deployment of UGC.

First there is to be mentioned that the mobile part of UGC will become more and more important. In the near future most of the cell phones will be equipped with cameras, broadband internet flatrates and GPS, thus the users will be enabled to instantly text- or video-blog and share media via their mobile phones and things like geotagging will not longer be a foreign word to many people.

Furthermore, the traditional media will have to evolve as UGC gets more and more accepted. As the sentence “The merging of two great forms will create even more value.”¹⁰ predicts, the combination of the traditional publishing school and UGC will not only be more valuable than insisting “on separate purity”⁹, but also be necessary for traditional media to survive.

Conclusion

From a technological point of view the whole world of UGC seems to look very bright as everything continues to get faster, cheaper and simpler.

However there is always the flip side of the coin and no one can estimate in which way the growth of UGC will affect society. Furthermore we have to deal with a vast amount of legal issues if you think about infringement of copyright, publication of inappropriate content or privacy and identity theft.

¹⁰ Blossom (2008).

Bibliography

[1] Wunsch-Vincent, S.; Vickery, G.: PARTICIPATIVE WEB: USER-CREATED CONTENT. 2007. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/57/14/38393115.pdf>. Call date 2009-01-02.

Annotation: The authors provide a broad variety of information concerning UGC. After describing what UGC is they concentrate on the evolution of UGC, its role and the challenges coming along with its impacts on different levels. Furthermore they analyze the forms of UGC and describe a lot of key drivers of UGC. This paper is a very useful source if you want to understand UGC in its full extent. The provided information can be considered reliable as it was released by the OECD. This was our main source of information because it almost perfectly covers all the important areas of our article.

[2] Stoeckl, R.; Rohrmeier, P.; Hess, T.: Motivations to produce User Generated Content: differences between webbloggers and videobloggers. 2007. [http://domino.fov.uni-mb.si/proceedings.nsf/Proceedings/81696C5508866CB8C12572EE0075D5E9/\\$File/Paper44.pdf](http://domino.fov.uni-mb.si/proceedings.nsf/Proceedings/81696C5508866CB8C12572EE0075D5E9/$File/Paper44.pdf). Call date 2009-01-02.

Annotation: This paper mainly concentrates on the incentives of especially those users who provide weblogs and videoblogs. The authors show the differences between the two kinds of bloggers and present results of their study which was carried out through online-questionnaires. The authors present their results in a very detailed way thereby helping the reader to get an objective view on the topic. They finish the paper with analyzing and discussing those results. This thesis should be considered an additional way of information and it helped us in getting a more detailed view on the motivations of producing UGC.

[3] Blossom, J.: User-Generated Media And Its Future Next To Traditional Publishing. 2005. http://www.masternewmedia.org/news/2005/12/20/usergenerated_media_and_its_future.htm. Call date 2009-01-02.

Annotation: This article draws a comparison between the development of amateur-made Jazz music in times when classical music composed by highly trained musicians was the accepted way of making music and the development of UGC in the context of traditional publishing schools. As well as Jazz has arisen and become a highly appreciated music style UGC will become a serious form of publishing in the author's point of view. In times of affordable technological means especially on the world wide web UGC will be granted a high rating and will have to be accepted by the traditional media, even if they fear turnover collapses owed to

the existence of UGC. This article provided a descriptive comparison helping us to understand in which context the future importance of UGC can be seen. As the author has gained credit in analyzing the publishing sector and coaching publishing executives we believe this article is a reliable and informative source.

[4] en.wikipedia.org: User-generated content. 2008.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User-generated_content. Call date 2009-01-02.

[5] Johnson, Benkamin K.: Incentives to Contribute in Online Collaboration: Wikipedia as Collective Action. 2008.

http://www.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/3/3/0/2/pages233027/p233027-2.php. Call date 2009-01-02.

[6] Duval, E., Ochoa, X.: Quantitative Analysis of User-Generated Content on the Web. In: Web Science. 2008/04/22.

<http://journal.webscience.org/34/1/WebEvolve2008-03.pdf>. Call date 2009-01-02.

Annotation: This paper claims to be the first one to show strong scientific evidence for the theory that UGC production follows "long-tail" distributions and has a "participation inequality". Therefore eleven different Websites in terms of UGC are analyzed and classified in categories. The paper gives an introduction to the topic, explains UGC as an Information-Production-Process. It describes how the data for the quantitative analysis was collected and sampled, which is followed by the actual quantitative analysis. Subsequently the implications of the findings are presented and conclusions are drawn. The Source is very helpful for finding empirical evidence of UGC and it helped us getting a good overview and comparison in an empirical approach. Moreover, the criteria for the sampled objects seem to be solid.