

UGC and Participatory Culture: The Impact of Internet Content Creation on the Expression and Dissemination of Individual Ideas

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Abstract. This article aims to systematically examine and explore the profound impact of the development of internet technology media on user-generated content (UGC) and its dissemination patterns. Drawing on theories of media environments and participatory culture, this article employs a literature review approach to integrate recent research on a variety of media platforms, including blogs, chat medias, online novels, long and short videos, and games and its live-stream. Understanding the characteristics of different media environments holds important implications for not only both the contents creators and platforms, also the researchers. This research finds that the media of internet fundamentally democratizes content creation, while the diverse characteristics of different technology that used on media have shaped diverse creative paradigms. The conclusion of this research consider that the core driving force behind the internet's content creation is its significant lowering of the barrier to create and disseminate user-generated content, encouraging user contribution, interaction, and co-creation, thereby generating content and social connections. Finally, the article identifies limitations of this research, such as insufficient critical analysis of algorithmic power, and offers directions for future research.

Keywords: Internet content creation, user-generated content (UGC), media environment theory, participatory culture.

1. Introduction

Since the last century, content creation in human society has undergone tremendous changes in tandem with the development and evolution of various media. As early as 2008, figures including Microsoft CEO Bill Gates and Google's "Father of the Internet," Vint Cerf, predicted that with the advancement of mobile media like cell phones and the increase in internet upload and download speeds, the creation of contents, including news, film, and articles, would no longer be limited to a small group of professionals. Instead, it would become accessible to anyone with access to the vast mobile internet platform. This would ultimately bring communication to the masses, ushering in an era of personalization and customization for media and art. With the advancement of technology, their predictions almost come true.

Nowadays, the internet offers a wide variety of technological media for people to express their thoughts. Through social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, novel platforms like WebNovel, Syosetu, and Pixiv, widely accepted short and long video platforms like YouTube and Tik Tok, massive gaming platforms like Steam, and livestreaming platforms like Twitch, which allow individuals to communicate with one another and with groups, people can gain the most detailed and comprehensive understanding of the diverse expressions and thoughts of every individual. Therefore, it can be argued that the expression and dissemination of individual ideas in this era has reached a level never before achieved.

Besides, each medium has its own distinct impact on individual users' content creation requirements and expressive effects. While research on the impact of these technological media on the creation and dissemination of works has been extensive, there is currently no comprehensive analysis of the varying impacts of these different media on the methods and dissemination of content. Only by fully and clearly understanding the impact of different internet media on the creation and dissemination of individual ideas can people better assess the internet's social impact and significance.

Therefore, this study focuses on the development and changes in the creation of Internet content and the changes in the creation of content by individual users. The goal of this paper is to provide a summary and analysis of existing research for subsequent research on Internet content creation, and to a certain extent, to serve as a comprehensive theoretical guide for individuals who wish to create Internet content. Additionally, this paper reviews the research on the impact of user-generated content and user participation on content dissemination through the method of literature review, based on the media environment theory and participatory culture theory, by querying and integrating the research on the impact of different technological media over the years. This type of review method can better focus on a wider range of research directions and content. This paper mainly focuses on the creation of current Internet content, including the impact of different carriers such as blogs and novels, long and short videos, and games on the expression and dissemination of individual ideas, especially the media's empowerment of creation and the impact of the media on user participation in creation.

2. The development of internet content creation

Since the establishment of the Internet in the 1960s and 1970s, the creation of content using the Internet and its carriers (television, computers, mobile phones, etc.) has changed all previous creative models. Marshall McLuhan pointed out in the last century that media is an extension of people and can shape the creation and dissemination of information. "Electronic media instantly and continuously creates a general field of interactive events in which everyone participates" [1]. This is fully reflected in the creation of Internet content.

The influence of media has received great attention in this regard. As Arturo Arriagada have studied, different media platforms have different requirements and influences on creators, which has an impact on the content creators' choice of their dissemination media [2]. Fenwick McKelvey believe that this is because the media power composed of content discovery platforms coordinates users, content creators and software application platforms, making the created content more attractive, thereby greatly increasing the probability of content creators, especially individual creators, being discovered and paid attention to, and attracting more people to actively participate in the content creation of these platforms. This is the "discoverability" of Internet content creation [3].

At the same time, the Internet medium has greatly expanded the methods and definitions of creation. In his 2021 summary of User Generated Content (UGC), Marcelo Luis believes that "User-

generated Content is any kind of text, data or action performed by online digital systems users, published and disseminated by the same user through independent channels, that incur an expressive or communicative effect either on an individual manner or combined with other contributions from the same or other sources.” [4]. He also emphasized that in the modern Internet, personal content creation has sufficient conditions to be widely disseminated and is the foundation of social media, which reflects the importance and irreplaceability of UGC.

In addition, Henry Jenkins pointed out in his book “Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century” that modern Internet platforms provide a participatory cultural approach to content creation, which is characterized by low barriers to artistic expression and public participation, strong support for content creation, dissemination and sharing among users through platforms and algorithms, and informal and shared guidance among participants. It allows individuals to create, reinterpret and re-disseminate traditional media content, thereby building a sense of social connection and making people believe that making contributions in the community is crucial. This culture is reshaping education methods and personal identity, emphasizing the effective use of one's own unique skills and knowledges through new media technologies [5].

From this can people see that Internet content creation is no longer an activity limited to specific people using specific tools like traditional content creation, and it can receive wider attention than ever before.

2.1. The development of internet text creation

The development of the internet first and foremost and continuously impacted human writing, a phenomenon shaped by the early nature of the internet. Writing is one of the oldest creative activities in human's history. As came into the internet age, the limited bandwidth of the early internet meant that people could only browse text-heavy websites. In fact, this spurred the early development of online literature and art.

Blog was the first thing to be emerged. This is a way for people to publish their personal opinions or comments on a specific website. Tim Highfield pointed out that blogs have a very early application origin, launched in the 1990s, and were mature enough in 2002. In addition to writing personal diaries, blogs also serve as a channel for everyone to share opinions, expertise, analysis and comments. Anyone can start blogging, and anyone's blog may have millions of readers. Many users outside the literary professional field also started blogging. Although blogs were quickly replaced by some “social media platforms” such as Facebook and Twitter around the 2010s, they have historical significance in encouraging Internet users to create independent content [6].

Online social networks such as Facebook and Twitter have revolutionized online literary creation. Facebook and Twitter are both user-participatory social platforms. Research by Moira Burke, et al. suggests that these social networking sites encourage users to contribute more content rather than the platform providing content directly [7]. Vladimir Barash, et al. believe that this has led to users no longer being simply recipients of information on the Internet as they used to be, but rather expressing their own characteristics and unique ideas to others, that is, being both users and creators [8]. An analysis of UGC by young Twitter users pointed out that UGC can bring stronger emotional experiences, whether positive or negative, which affects their behavior on social media platforms, making them more inclined to express their own opinions, write comments, tweet or evaluate others [9]. This shows that social media platforms have further promoted people's enthusiasm for creating content on the Internet (regardless of the length of the topic or whether they are professional or not).

At the same time, unlike the popularity of short articles on Facebook and Twitter, China and many East Asian countries have online novels and their websites as a medium for long articles. By 2024, the number of Internet users in China will reach 1.108 billion, and the number of online novel users will reach 575 million. More than half of the Internet users will be online novel users, and the number of online novel authors will reach 311.98 billion [10].

According to a 2017 study by YUYAN FENG, online novels have diverse carriers and sources, ranging from BBS, novel websites to blogs and social media. The main creators of online novels are not traditional literati, and many have not systematically learned writing methods. The openness and discoverability of online literature websites mean that anyone can publish articles, create their own works, and express their own ideas, which was unimaginable in the past. FENG said that the immediacy of interaction between readers and authors in online novels is unprecedented. In the creation process of previous novels, readers often have to wait until the author has completely finished writing certain parts of the article before they can see it and comment on it. However, in online novels, every word written by the author and every thought expressed will be scrutinized by readers [11]. This means that the opinions of readers may affect the author's creative behavior, which in turn prompts the author to reflect on whether the way of expressing his or her ideas can be accepted by readers, making creation a collective activity that interacts between individuals and the collective instead of an independent individual activity.

With the continuous development of technology and the increasing popularity of online novels, the longer length and more complete storylines of online novels make them the first choice for adaptation to multimedia forms. Jin Li believes that online novels are not only a reproduction of traditional literary content, but also a profound cultural integration. In the future, with the further development of the "Internet+" era, online novels will continue to innovate in content creation, technological innovation, and audience interaction. They will form a more active cultural ecosystem and encourage more users to participate in this creation or derivative work [12].

In addition to the creation from text to multimedia, derivative work novels (fan fiction) that draw inspiration from existing works and then create fan works have also become a major category of online novels. From the development of fan fiction sorted out by Lincoln Geraghty and others, it can be seen that fan fiction draws inspiration from other novels, videos or games, or even just a conversation on a social media platform, and then adds the creator's own understanding, views or thoughts to form unique and imaginative articles. The creators of these are often not professionals, but individuals who are passionate about these things. The fan fiction they create will further inspire the creative desire of others, making fan creation vibrant to this day [13].

On the other hand, Runguo Tian, et al. also pointed out that these fan creations often face challenges from readers regarding the quality of the content, lack of recognition from mainstream culture, and tensions with the copyright issues of the original version, all of which hinder the creation and dissemination of content [14].

At the same time, Han Xu, et al. pointed out that in the creation of online novels, readers' feedback influencing the plot development and theme is also a major feature, which is in contrast to traditional novels where readers have little input. Through the Internet platform, participatory culture among users can cultivate a sense of social connection among participants, enhance community participation and the construction of content networks [15].

2.2. Development of internet video content creation

YouTube is a video media website that appeared at the same time as Facebook and Twitter. However, the research of Ana Cristina Munaro, et al. shows that, unlike users of other social media

websites, YouTube users seem to prefer medium and long videos [16]. Susanne Kopf pointed out that as a representative of medium and long video websites, social media websites like YouTube provide platform infrastructure that users rely on, and these social media websites usually have many users who are willing to upload content for free. In other words, YouTube may not rely on paid creators to make profits, but is completely based on UGC. What the platform does is to provide and disseminate UGC to specific groups of people through specific algorithms [17]. Meeyoung Cha, et al. believe that this has reshaped the way people receive information, enhanced the importance of social interaction, and given users more creativity [18].

On the other hand, the platform's algorithm will also screen and disseminate user content, which requires a certain level of user creation. Ana pointed out that in order to better express insights on social media, it is necessary not only to pay attention to content, but also to pay attention to language style and communication strategies. For example, if creators want to increase the number of likes and comments on YouTube to gain promotion and attention, they should produce more medium and long videos with subjective evaluation content. Jaeyoung An's research on the ability requirements of content creators also pointed out that when users aim to become popular video content producers, in order to adapt to the platform's algorithms and the consumption needs of other users, they must have the necessary content planning, interaction and content production capabilities, and must find and provide valuable information [19]. This is that when users create content that expresses their own thoughts and opinions, they no longer just consider their own feelings and senses, but also consider the feelings and opinions of others. This makes users as content creators begin to distinguish between "professional" content creation and creation that is just uploading videos at random.

At the same time, Paul Duncum's research shows that young people on YouTube will actively participate in cultural exchanges, turning from passive consumption to active production. In participatory interactions, these participatory communities build a platform for young people to develop their identity and self-identity. Among them, YouTube's technology plays a key role. YouTube promotes user participation in social interaction by providing a user-friendly interface that displays relevant information such as the date of video upload, number of views, and user reviews. It encourages viewers, users, and content authors to interact through comments and exchanges, thereby cultivating a participatory community culture. In addition, the platform's algorithm recommends videos based on users' previous choices, thereby promoting further interaction and participation among enthusiasts with similar interests and hobbies [20].

In the meantime, short video platforms represented by TikTok have become increasingly popular in recent years. Pooja Jain, et al. pointed out in 2022 that TikTok has in fact become the most popular social media platform among young people [21]. Due to the characteristics of short video platforms, Aliaksandra Shutsko's 2020 study showed that people prefer to use short video platforms such as TikTok for entertainment, forwarding and sharing videos that bring joy, and regard these "quasi-social activities" as a stage for performance, storytelling, and expressing self-views and identities in a performance way [22]. ARANTXA, et al.'s 2022 study also pointed out that compared to making serious and traditional stories, people on TikTok prefer to create works with higher collective participation centered on "sharing", transcending the self-centered social media structure. This allows users to create more popular content, stimulates individual creativity, and promotes and encourages people to create and disseminate more self-expressive content [23]. At the same time, surveys by Zicheng Cheng, et al., Hilal Ahmad, et al., and Jiayi Wang all indicate that users on TikTok prefer to create, watch, and share user-generated content rather than authoritative content. Neither creation nor dissemination require highly specialized skills or interpretation [24-26]. This

suggests that compared to traditional information recipients, these short video social media users prefer to express their own opinions and ideas. Furthermore, short video platforms place fewer demands on the quality of content and encourage individual creation or participation in collective creation.

2.3. Games and live broadcasting on the internet

As a medium, the game itself can only convey the thoughts and opinions of its creators. However, in the process of game dissemination, the interpretation and derivative work of the game by game players is a broad stage that brings together personal creations and ideas. In Thomas Byers' study of game content creators, it is pointed out that game content creators refer to individuals who develop, distribute and publish game UGC, and publish derivative work content related to the game through various media forms [24]. These derivative works have the characteristics of full participatory culture. Francesca Comunello, et al.'s research on the Italian game community pointed out that the participatory cultural form of game interaction can cultivate collective consciousness and mutual sharing motivation among users, encouraging them to create, share and collaborate on content. By recognizing individual contributions in the game community, the participation and enthusiasm of user interaction are improved, and they further participate in the creation of UGC [25].

Another important area of gaming in internet content creation is live streaming. In their 2021 study, Li Yi, et al. pointed out that gamers first shared their gameplay with other players after the game ended. Eventually, with the development of video media and the emergence of video platforms such as YouTube and Twitch, people began to share their gaming content in real time and communicate with other players in real time, making games that originally did not support multiple people playing at the same time also have social and popular attributes. The article pointed out that as an emerging communication medium, the Internet platform provides individuals with a variety of expansion functions, greatly broadening the scope and range of cultural exchanges [26]. In an earlier article written by Lim Joon Soo, et al., it was pointed out that new media such as game live streaming can not only provide users with interpersonal relationships and emotional understanding, but also affect their thinking patterns, emotional reactions and behaviors. Users may enter a psychological state called emotional connection, in which originally independent individual users will have a special feeling and feel that they have a certain connection with other viewers and the host of the live broadcast program. This sense of shared connection comes from the rapid, real-time chat with other users, who respond to each other's comments and questions— perhaps a sincere comment about the current live streamer, or answers to questions about the content being streamed. When viewers are in the rapid, real-time chat environment, they may temporarily experience a sense of immersion, or a “psychological feeling of participation,” which reflects the participatory culture of gaming and live streaming media [27].

3. Results and discussion

From the analysis of existing articles, it can be seen that different technical media, due to their different characteristics, have different impacts on the form, style, method, difficulty level of content creation and even the relationship between creators and audiences.

In the creation of written media, content creation focuses more on the method and depth of expression of ideas, as well as the continuity of narrative and plot. In online novels, a form of creation unique to the internet, a creative model of real-time interaction between authors and readers has emerged, transforming the creative process from a solitary, closed-door project to a collective

activity within the community. This also reflects the power of content communities emphasized in participatory culture.

In the creation of long and short videos, depending on the media format, there are platforms that require relatively more expertise, content discovery, and algorithmic approaches to long video, while short video platforms offer extremely low production costs, strong entertainment value, and "meme"-like dissemination. However, it can be seen that both platforms have greatly expanded people's cognitive methods through media, empowered content creation, and increased individuals' ability and willingness to create content.

Games and livestreaming have taken participatory culture to new heights of real-time interaction. The inherent interactivity and fragmentation of games provide rich material for derivative work, while livestreaming, through mechanisms like virtual gifts and barrage comments, creates unprecedented emotional connections and a sense of presence. Viewers are no longer passive spectators, but co-creators who directly participate in the creation of content through real-time chat and consumption, forming a highly immersive and emotional community.

On the other hand, while internet content creation is booming amidst its current rapid growth, it also presents new challenges. While the internet empowers individual creativity, the monopolistic tendencies of large platforms and the visibility and popularity of content driven by big data algorithms can lead to a convergence of content creation focused on so-called hot topics and buzz, catering to the rules of traffic algorithms while neglecting its social significance and deeper value. Furthermore, copyright issues such as those faced by fan fiction, as well as questions about content quality and mainstream cultural acceptance, which all authors of derivative works based on traditional media may face, indicate that this booming trend still requires attention.

4. Conclusion

This article systematically examines the development of internet content creation and its specific forms across various media (text, video, games, and livestreaming) through a literature review. Drawing on theories of media environments and participatory culture, this study finds that internet media has fundamentally reshaped the ways content is created and disseminated. Its core impact lies in significantly lowering the barriers to creation and dissemination, extending the reach of media to individuals and strengthening participatory culture. As McLuhan observed, media shape the patterns of information. Blogs, social media, YouTube, TikTok, online fiction platforms, and livestreaming—as distinct technological media—each uniquely extend users' expressive capabilities and social reach. Together, they form the ecological foundation of what Henry Jenkins describes as "participatory culture": low-barrier artistic expression, powerful platform algorithmic support, and user interaction driven by shared interests. This has transformed content creation from the privilege of a few specialized institutions into an everyday practice accessible to the general public.

This review not only provides valuable references for the study of Internet content creation, but also, by understanding the characteristics of different media environments and participatory culture, has considerable guiding significance for content creators to optimize their creative strategies, for platform designers to build a healthier ecosystem, and for researchers to evaluate the social and cultural impact of the Internet.

The limitations of this article are that it employs a literature review approach, and its conclusions are highly dependent on existing published research. This means that this study may not capture cutting-edge trends in media platform development, such as the impact of AIGC technology development, nor does it focus on phenomena that have not been adequately addressed by academic research, such as the differences in media communication methods brought about by the unique

cultures of certain regions. Furthermore, this article does not consider the subjective nature of internet platforms as media environments. For example, it fails to provide a deeper analysis of how algorithms, as a form of technological power, may influence creative behavior, and the negative effects they may bring, such as information cocoons and the homogenization of creation.

In future research, researchers can further focus on emerging issues such as the mutual influence and differences between different media, the impact of algorithms on the creative autonomy of creators, and the impact and integration of AIGC technology on the existing content creation ecosystem.

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