

User created content and cultural diversity in online worlds

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UCC: An optimistic start

The Internet as a new creative outlet has altered the economics of information production and led to the democratisation of media production and changes in the nature of communication and social relationships (sometimes referred to as the ‘rise - or return - of the amateurs’). Changes in the way users produce, distribute, access and re-use information, knowledge and entertainment potentially gives rise to **increased user autonomy, increased participation and increased diversity**. These may result in lower entry barriers, distribution costs and user costs and **greater diversity of works as digital shelf space is almost limitless**.

(OECD, Participative Web, 2007)

UCC: An optimistic start (cont.)

The interesting thing about these types of games [MMOGs] is that they organize the production of 'scripts' very differently from movies or television shows. In a game like *Ultima Online* or *EverQuest*, the role of the commercial provider is not to tell a finished, highly polished story to be consumed start to finish by passive consumers. Rather, the role of the game provider is to build tools with which users collaborate to tell a story. [...]

The point to understand about MMOGs is that they produce a discrete element of 'content' that was in the past dominated by centralized professional production.

(Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*, 2006)

Research questions / parameters of the discussion

- UCC in online worlds (definition, value and limitations);
- promoting UCC as a possible (and appropriate?) channel for promoting cultural diversity;
- possible designs for State intervention (within and outside gameplay).

A narrow definition of UCC

- some sort of ‘add-on’ as an expression of player’s creativity;
- qualifies as ‘cultural expression’ in the sense of the UNESCO Convention;
- differentiate between creations and chattel, (i.e. merely objects acquired through gameplay).



Pac-Man, 1980

MMOGs

(massively multi-player online games)



World of Warcraft®

(7 language versions with a Russian edition forthcoming; 10 million subscribers worldwide as of 22 January 2008).

Virtual worlds

- break from the conventional industry model;
- a platform + tools not an already 'full' content environment;
- IP rights to the users / creators;
- substantially augmented users' agency;
- substantially augmented possibilities, including for producing diverse cultural content.

Second Life®







Spore® :

- massively single-player online game;
- enables players to control the evolution of a species from its beginnings as a unicellular organism, through development as an intelligent and social creature, to interstellar exploration;
- massive scope and open-ended gameplay.

Limitations of UCC within online worlds

- limitation 1: the **game environment** itself;
- limitation 2: the **commercial (and private lawmaking)** nature of games;
- limitation 3: **intellectual property (IP)**.

UCC limitation 1: the game environment

- the narrative, the magic circle, the community, the communication, etc.;
- the technical tools available and the latitude to use them;
- the intertwined rights of players and game developers;

The freedom of participants to create content as they wish can be difficult to harmonize with the business of building compelling virtual environment. While UCC may be the key ingredient that makes virtual worlds appealing, it is an ingredient that can overwhelm virtual worlds as well.

(Lastowka, 2008)

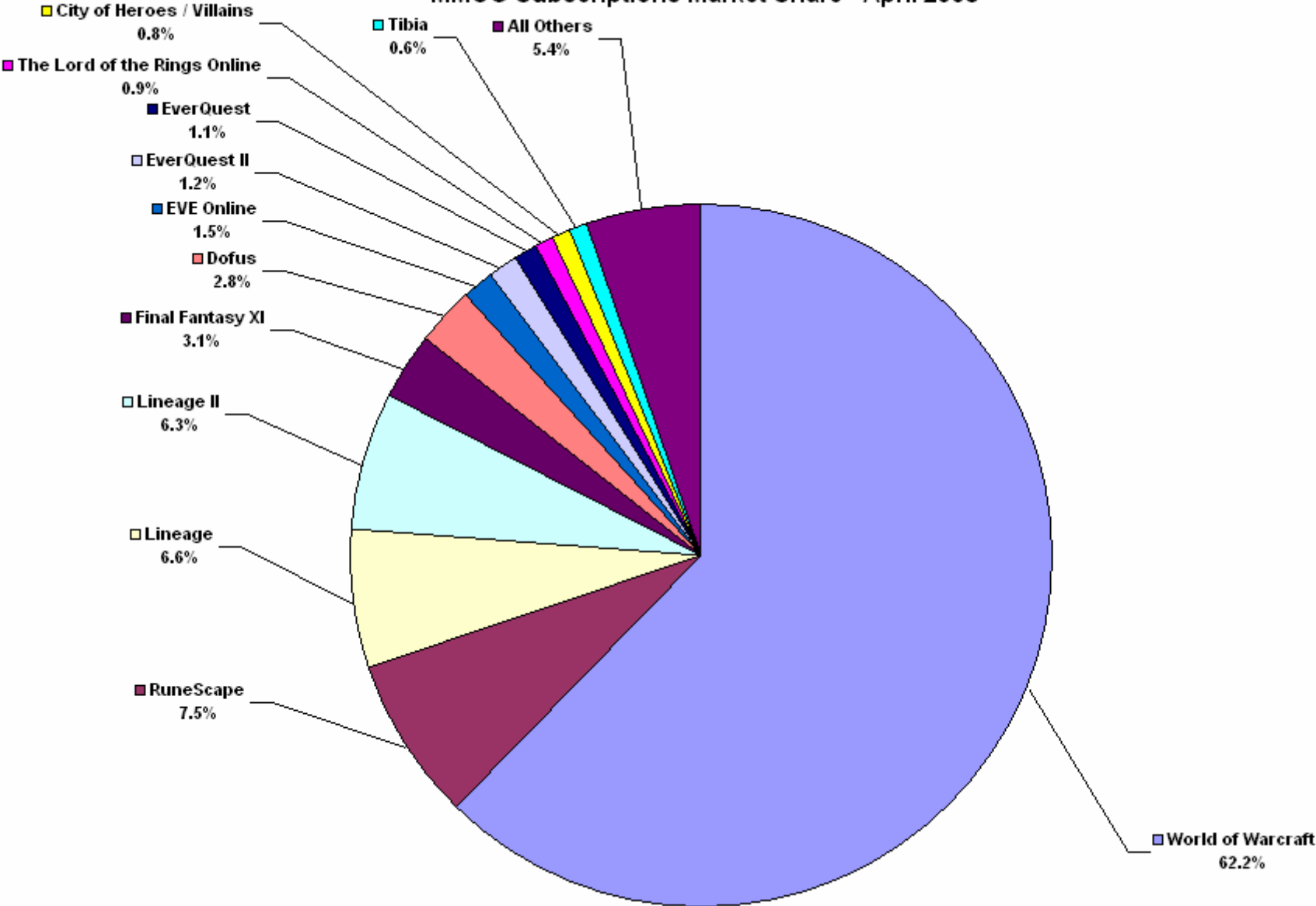
UCC limitation 2: the commercial (& private lawmaking) nature of games

- virtual worlds are **commercial enterprises**;
- profit maximisation and risk minimisation, which translate into two main goals: (i) **attracting people to join the virtual world**; and (ii) **retaining them over time within the network**;
- pursuit through (i) **the content offered**; (ii) **the price**; and (iii) **the regulatory framework** of online worlds (Mayer-Schönberger and Crowley, 2004); **UCC**;
- private lawmaking (code and contract).

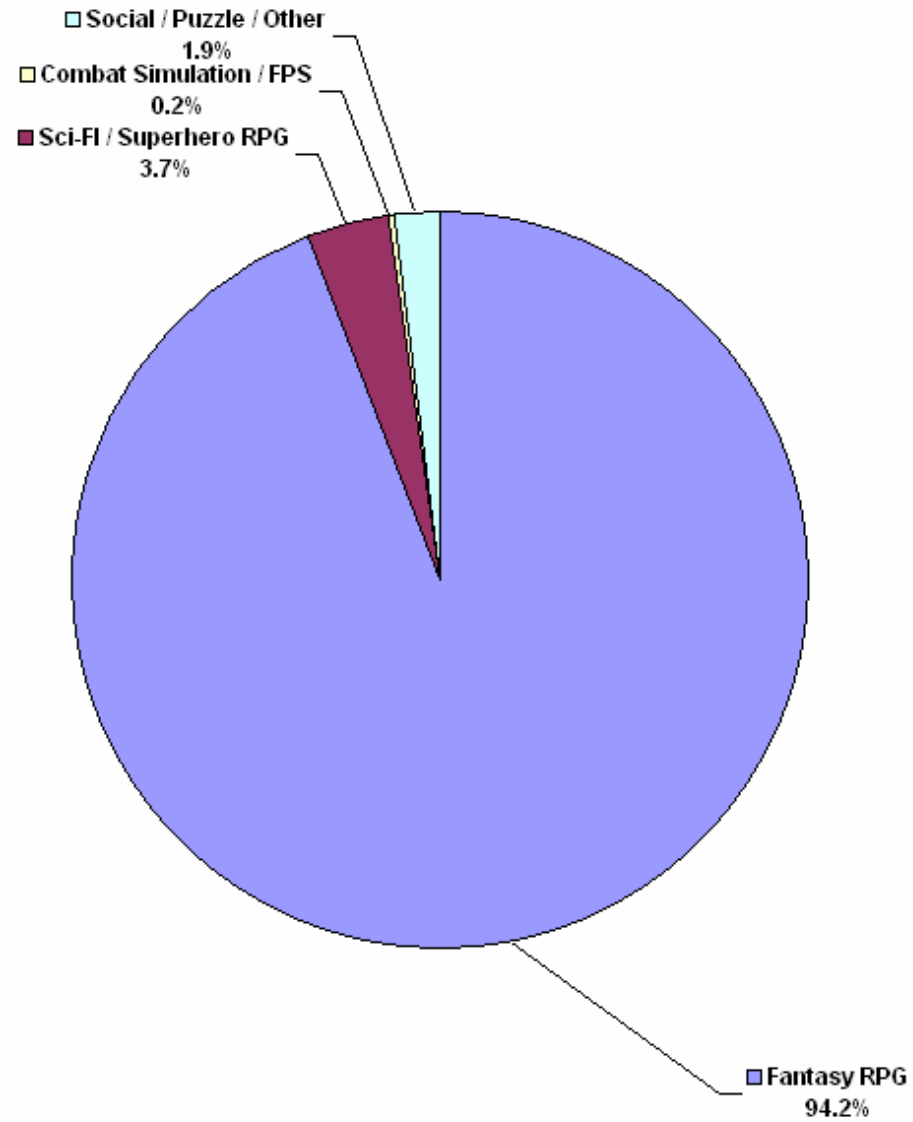
UCC limitation 3: intellectual property

- complexity and uncertainty of copyright application;
- UCC as derivative works;
- ‘walled gardens’: content created is locked in-game through EULAs;
- fair use application is risky and cost intensive;
- Second Life’s model: implementation problems and thriving litigation;
- custom-made licences.

MMOG Subscriptions Market Share - April 2008



MMOG Subscriptions Market Share By Genre - April 2008



UCC → cultural diversity

- UCC as unmediated communication;
- UCC reflects local content and languages;
- UCC enriching the political discourse;
- UCC as a challenge for traditional media;
- primary positive effects valid only in a limited way;
- secondary positive effects.

Fellini. Spielberg. Guy with an Xbox®.



The 2005 Machinima Film Festival.
Explore the evolution of animation and filmmaking.

Saturday, November 12, 2005

Museum of the Moving Image

35 Ave at 36 Street - Astoria, NY
Hours: 11am-6:30pm

Admission: \$10 / \$7.50 (Seniors/College Students)
\$5 (Kids 5-18) / Free (Museum Members)

For Machinima and festival information, visit: festival.machinima.org
For Museum information, visit: www.movingimage.us



Sponsors



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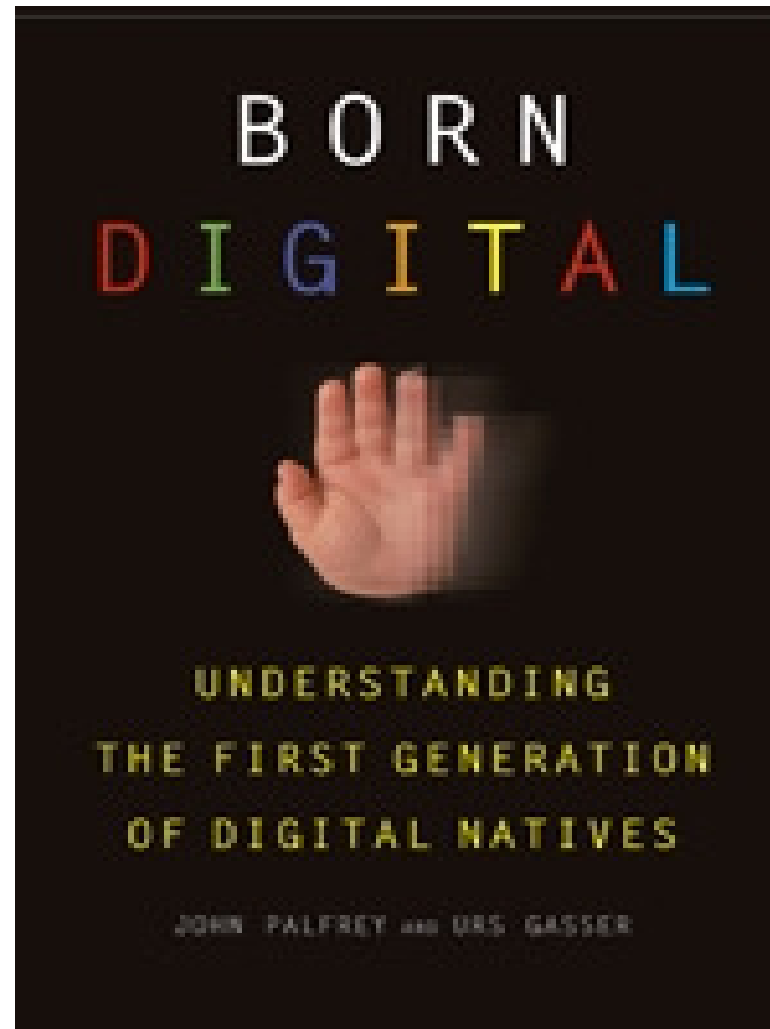
® Xbox is a registered trademark of the Microsoft Corporation.

- identification of new artists;
- emergence of new art forms (e.g. machinima).

UCC → cultural diversity: secondary effects

- the **creative play** (Cohen);
- UCC allows the creative mind of the audience to criticise and personalise positive narratives; **enhances collaboration between the industry and audiences** (Jenkins);
- the ubiquitous practice of making cultural artefacts enables **better readers, listeners, and viewers of professionally produced culture** (Benkler).

A new generation of creators



Basic Books, 2008 20

Promoting cultural diversity through UCC promotion

- State intervention: needed, possible or harmful to the ‘magic circle’?
- simple translation of real-world rules could have unintended consequences;
- more transparency and relaxation of the limitations;
- public content publisher.



Thank you.