

Chapter 42

Open Content: An Inference for Developing an Open Information Field

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ABSTRACT

The rapidly growing open content movement has intense outcomes and teaching approaches for the emergent social learning. Open content is any kind of creative work, or content, published under a license that explicitly allows copying and modifying of its information by anyone; on the other hand, a closed system follows a completely proprietary approach. In this chapter, the authors discuss open vs. closed systems, open content development process and model, challenges in content decision, 4Rs in open content, and tools. They also highlight some of the instances where open content has proved beneficial for the education, organization, and the users in building an open knowledge society.

INTRODUCTION

Open content aims to apply open source principles and strategies to various types of data and information that can be freely accessed on the World Wide Web (Muffatto, 2006, p. 209). Pfaffenberger (2001) had argued that “the healthy democracy depends not only on the ability of citizens to access facts and ideas freely, but also to produce derivative works that substantially incorporate and rework

the means of expression found in copyrighted works.” The value chains of open content models considerably vary to that of traditional and other publishing models and rules out two possibilities of production of open content (1) One within a virtual community as a source and (2) another possible source is content in the public domain. This could be bibliographic data, sound, pictures, movies, or texts that have no copyright and orphaned works (Cedergren, 2003). Consequently,

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the society is heading towards a “social production” in the information economy that is “enabled by cheap computing and fast pervasive networks where people are giving their time individually or in collaboration with others to produce goods for free” (Benkler, 2006). As with the case of many developing countries, developing open content has been faced with enormous challenges—developing localized content, organizational support, and funding avenues being less. However, if we take the example of Indic content on Wikipedia, it has been found enormously growing into an one-stop inclusive portal, documenting details which was hitherto unheard before in the areas like indigenous arts, marginalized communities, feminism, unconventional knowledge—LGBT lives, equipped assistive technologies, and resources for all kinds of differently abled persons, uncommon topics, and even oral citations (Kumaran, 2011).

Since the time open source made inroads into the verticals of information technology businesses, the need for free content arose subsequently. On the business side for many organizations adapting business models to capitalize on the new generation of consumers on ‘co-creating’ way is more promising than on passive consumption (Ernst & Young, 2012). Internet has tremendously influenced open publishing in current times, bringing in new a wave of information hierarchies with generativity—defined as the capacity of unrelated and unaccredited audiences to create, share content, and code (Hindu, 2010). With unrestricted access, opening up the machine readable data for creating value applications is on the rise among governments and public organizations worldwide with many opportunities to glean insights by data analytics, research, and development pushing the frontiers of science, technology and social sciences. Few examples of open data projects, data.gov, data.gc.ca and data.worldbank.org, are noteworthy to mention here. Open educational practices and resources are a direct response to privatization of knowledge as they promote their exchange across the world with the aim of

increasing human intellectual capacity (Piedra, et al., 2009). If data is stored in a standard format and made easily accessible, the community will find umpteen ways to create value of it (Murali, 2010). The recent announcement of Britannica Encyclopedia’s decision to go completely digital, inviting users’ into its majestic portal espouse the fact that open publishing models are coming of age and here to stay as Wikipedia flourishes in an open access way by crowdsourcing (Murray, 2012). The uniqueness of open content lies in the combination of openly accessible resources and modifiability; moreover, it complements the existing licenses, not duplicating or replacing them. Open content development is more a by-product of open source movement and hived off to create a niche for itself to create contents in unique ways combining the potentials of computing applications, free tools and open platforms.

There have been widespread apprehensions whether open source communities can thrive with no business values attached. Since the times of open source software development to down the lane of open content platforms, the value chain creation is triggered by content producers and creators as against the users’ in business models (Cedergren, 2003). Open knowledge acquired through personalization and sociability of the contents makes social results for everyone as well as personal knowledge enrichment with the aid of social networking sites and technologies (Lee & Ge, 2010). Especially the higher education sector sees this as a potential area to catch, engage, and create learning communities to enable an open scholarship ecosystem replacing the closed system of learning practices (Chad, 2011).

The digital library worlds are slowly transitioning to a newer environment where powers of the many library operations are resting with user communities: be it tagging in the library catalogues and creating lists; depositing the research output in institutional repositories to socializing the library services and activities with social media applications. Many add-ons and applications further help

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