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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Boosting Creativity through Digital Disruption? The Role of Co-Creation Platforms in the Media Production Field

Sara Monaci
Politecnico di Torino, Italy
sara.monaci@polito.it

Web technologies transformed the media production field in many aspects: audio-visual contents in particular, are at the centre of a reshaping process involving their use, creative production, distribution and consumption. The effects of *digital disruption* are revealed though a media production field characterized by an increasing complexity. Co-creation environments emerge as new digital intermediaries, which may integrate the open collaboration of peers with the need to identify new ways of recognising and enhancing creativity in a sustainable way. Based on an empirical analysis of seventy co-creation web platforms related to the audiovisual domain, the paper aims at identifying an organisational model for creative production whilst reflecting on the role of platforms such as Tongal, Userfarm, Filmaka and others amongst consolidated institutions such as the cultural industries and new technological players such as Netflix, Hulu, Amazon etc.

Keywords: Co-creation platforms; cultural industries; video production; SVOD platforms; organisational model of cultural production; Netflix

Introduction

The transformative and often disruptive effects of digital media and communication networks involve institutions and creative production processes to a significant extent. Cultural industries and major media corporations are facing important transformations which affect both the forms of production, with their aesthetic and language hybridisations, as well as cultural consumption, shifting activities towards interactive and transmedia entertainment (Jenkins, 2006a; Phillips, 2012; Leonzi and Andò, 2014).

Video in its various forms – including memes, adverts, music videos, and Netflix series – is experiencing an unprecedented dissemination and repositioning on the web (Casetti, 2015: 17–42), and can be accessed at any time through connected mobile devices everywhere they go.

Cultural industries are consolidating their dominant position in the media world (Castells, 2009: 71–98; Hesmondhalgh, 2013: 192–5). However, the disruptive effects of reproduction and communication technologies force these players to transition *from* defending positions they have acquired through copyright battles, *to* opening up to new forms of production and consumption on the web by either buying or developing in-house socio-technical innovations arising in their respective media sectors.

In this context, we can notice the following trends:

- Despite the global economic crisis media corporations such as Disney or Google will see their profits grow over the next few years, in part due to market expansion and large audiences, in markets such as China and Brazil (PWC, 2015);
- New web players – such as SVOD (Subscription Video On Demand) platforms (Tryon, 2015: 106) – are emerging onto the media production scene in full force. These players are strongly linked to ICT (Information and Communication Technology) assets and have a consolidated position on the web, as in the case of Netflix, Hulu and Amazon with Amazon Instant Video. This position allows them to monitor and manage online markets without excluding possible developments in addition via traditional distribution channels, such as cinemas, generalist TV channels and pay television;
- New forms of co-creation are creating vibrant scenarios, where industrial production converges with peer production (Vellar, 2015), integrating open collaboration amongst users with forms of organisation and the enhancement of creative content.

The paper focuses on co-creation platforms understood as *online environments where new processes of crowdsourcing creativity through open collaboration take place*. Within this scenario outlined, co-creation platforms turn out to be potentially new digital intermediaries, able to integrate participatory tensions of peer production into the structured organization of creativity.

My investigation is based on a multiple case analysis undertaken in two phases: the first step (March to October 2014) was to analyse approximately seventy general crowdsourcing cases (Annex 1, Annex 2), which included crowdfunding, knowledge discovery and management platforms. The second stage (October 2014 to July 2015) focused on platforms dedicated to audiovisual co-creation (Table 1, Table 2). The sample was selected based on the results of a focus group with qualified testimonials (video production professionals) and the use of the main crowdsourcing directories, such as crowdsourcing.org. This method focused on the organizational model and on the social networking and collaboration aspects related to the platforms. Qualitative analysis revealed that those two features were particularly significant in relation to *boosting creativity*: providing users with a sustainable system of creativity reward and a reliable organization in support.

Crowdsourcing and co-creation

Crowdsourcing has proved one of the most interesting phenomena in recent years. It emerged as an idea linked to the web 2.0, the rhetoric on the wisdom of the crowd (Surowiecki, 2005) and a new, promising organisational model for online cultural production. The term 'crowdsourcing' appeared for the first time in *Wired* (Howe, 2006). The phenomenon has been analysed in-depth in recent years. Brabham (2013), for example, reads it as an extension of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005) intended as the set of technologies and processes to create and enjoy content based on open collaboration, networking, and the opportunity for other users to reshape content and online processes:

Many of the early crowdsourcing companies and initiatives were started in this nascent period, as their founders capitalised on this articulation of technology, creative energy, and community. The technologies and social relationships that were fostered by those technologies were the fertile ground in which crowdsourcing took root in the early 2000s' (Brabham, 2013: 17–8).

Crowdsourcing developed from the social and technical innovations of Web 2.0, according to an organisational model strongly oriented towards the integration of enterprise in production and management processes with the aim of finding solutions to practical and theoretical problems. Brabham has carried out a systematic analysis of this phenomenon, identifying several types of crowdsourcing based on the problem being addressed:

1) *Knowledge discovery and management*, i.e. organisations that collect information or report problems, thereby creating resources and building collective knowledge, e.g. Peer-to-patent[1] and SeeClickFix;[2]
2) *Broadcast search*, i.e. organisations that seek empirically demonstrable solutions, e.g. InnoCentive;[3]
3) *Distributed Human Intelligence Tasking*, i.e. solutions for analysing large volumes of data where human intelligence is more effective than computers, e.g. Amazon Mechanical Turk;[4]
4) *Peer-vetted creative production or creative crowdsourcing*, i.e. organisations that deal with matters concerning aesthetics in its various application fields, such as advertising, design, cinema, and narrative. Examples include the Doritos Crash the SuperBowl Contest, Tongal, and Userfarm. This category is also known as *crowdcreation* (Howe, 2008), *consumer creation* (Potts et al., 2008; Banks and Humphreys, 2008), *crowdsourcing of creative tasks* (Schenk and Guittard, 2011) or *crowdsourcing of inventive activities* – CIA (Penin and Burger-Helmchen, 2011). Today, co-creation is the most common term to indicate forms of creative crowdsourcing. As far as production is concerned, organisations often use this approach to innovate their processes and products through the creative participation of external players (Erickson et al., 2012; Howe, 2008; Whitla, 2009). According to a perspective focusing more on sociological and cultural aspects, co-creation emphasises open participation and peer creativity in processes to develop, evaluate and promote film products, such as advertisements, video clips, web series and Hollywood productions (Escoffier and McKelvey, 2014; Roth and Kimani, 2014: 175–97).

Platforms, such as Tongal or Userfarm for example, enhance the value of wide participation. Unlike scientific and technological research platforms, such as Innocentive, where you have to demonstrate specific expertise, these platforms do not set any limitation to access. They organise production around contests, where they select the best creative proposals that meet the client's brief defined at the beginning of the process. Most of the platforms analysed herein award cash prizes, which range between a few hundred euro, as in the case of 2D design and logo creation platforms (e.g. YouCrea) and tens of thousands of euro (Tongal's richest contests). Then, there is the Doritos Superbowl Contest in the United States, which awards up to one million dollars.

Many co-creation platforms also provide users with various tools to create content directly on the platform (e.g. applications to write a screenplay) or collaborate with other users (e.g. Mofilm's blog or crew builder application). These tools help users network with other creatives in view of their participation in contests. In other instances, platforms can be used to assess film productions (even expensive ones) before distributing them. Escoffier and McKelvey (2014) highlight how co-creation platforms can become precious resources (even more useful than the focus groups traditionally set up by major Hollywood studios) for assessing the chances of success of a product. Preliminary investigations allow industries to consider the investment required to promote a film.

The empirical analysis carried out in this study[5] shows how co-creation platforms are attributable to Web 2.0 experiences but only to a certain extent. They are rather new forms of *cultural production organisation* that aim at innovating the distribution and communication processes of cultural products.

Based on this empirical analysis, the purpose of this article is to answer the following questions:

- What role do video co-creation platforms play in the current convergence between cultural industries and peer production processes?
- How do these platforms organise creative production processes compared to cultural industries and SVOD platforms?

Co-creation platforms: between production and consumption

Analysing the relation between cultural industries – i.e. profit-oriented organisations whose purpose is to produce and disseminate texts (Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Caves, 2002) – and Web 2.0 phenomena, we can notice a clear dichotomy between critical and *optimistic* (Hesmondhalgh, 2013: 317) positions. The former underline the hegemonic role of production environments and the illusory nature of the bottom-up creative processes boosted by the dynamism of Web 2.0 in the co-optation, exploitation, and control processes implemented by major media corporations (Hesmondhalgh 2013; Terranova, 2012; Fuchs, 2010, 2012, 2014; Lanier, 2010). The latter view the *participatory culture* (Jenkins et al. 2006b) of Web 2.0 not only as ephemeral, but also as in capable of transforming effectively consolidated production environments. All this is in view of a wider participation in cultural production, free access to individual and collective means of expression, and new organisational models for production and consumption that can ensure both creative autonomy and market sustainability (Jenkins 2006a, Jenkins et al. 2006b; Benkler, 2006; Boccia Artieri, 2012).

Without going into detail, what we can highlight is that this dichotomy may arise from a perspective that focuses on *power* and *control* in production environments on the one hand, and on emphasising new forms of consumption often intertwined with fan practices, aiming at a greater openness of online cultural sharing processes, on the other. In other words, the critical interpretation of cultural industries' policies is countered by the stance of those who take online fandom practices as their main argument to support an increasingly open cultural production scenario – a scenario bound less by copyright and market structures, where the free circulation of content can promote not only consumption, but also users' creativity, thereby improving the quality of their content (Vellar, 2015, Taddeo, 2012).

To explain co-creation and its potential as an organisational model for creative production, we need to shift our attention to the middle of the value chain that links production and consumption. This is where we can notice that production systems and practices are not the only places where most novelties have emerged in the third millennium. Many have emerged also, and more importantly, in the media considered as socio-technical systems (Flichy, 2008) radically changing contemporary forms of production and consumption.

Digitisation, networking, multi-platform distribution and globalisation are closely interlinked processes, which find their main carriers in the web and communication technologies (Castells, 2009). These phenomena affect both the social aspects related to the use and sharing of cultural content and the production and organisational aspects of industries, which identify new channels and strategies to reach new audiences through multi-platform distribution. The web and its disruptive effects on cultural processes are consequently the most appropriate context to analyse co-creation in its organisational, social, and symbolic aspects.

Digital disruption and the role of dominant technologies in content distribution

The Internet is commonly considered as a disruptive technology; compared to *sustaining technologies* which help large companies to improve established products performances, *disruptive technologies* such as those of the internet may enable the disruption of many industries – that has happened in many different domains: photography, retailing, music distribution and even higher education with the spread of online university courses (Christensen, 2013). Among the recent innovations, digital networks deserve in fact a particular attention. Franklin (2012) defines *digital disruption* as 'the clash between exponential rates of technological change on the one hand, and incremental rates of change in society, economics, politics and law in the disrupted industries. Long-established firms in the video, film, photography and television industries have witnessed dramatic changes in how their imagery is captured, edited, aggregated and distributed. These technology-based disruptions have been accompanied by disruptions in traditional business models (including pricing and intellectual property monetization), cost structures and value propositions that matter to a digitally native audience of consumers.'

The disruption carried out by the web has clearly involved cultural industries in more than one way. On the one hand, it has destroyed old business models (DeFilippi and Wikström, 2014) or radically transformed cultural value. In fact, millennials no longer identify this value with physical objects (films, records, DVDs), but with the chance to access information and content whenever they want and mix them however they like. On the other hand, new strategies are emerging, involving both old and new players (content aggregators, for example) in production, consumption, and distribution models, which only now are expressing their full potential. Digital disruption has had complex effects on media industries defined as well-structured production and consumption systems. It is likewise important to capture the destructive and creative forces in sociotechnical systems that link consumption processes to digital technologies, leading to changes that involve media production organisation.

The organisational model, which characterises cultural industries (Ryan 1992; Hesmondhalgh, 2013.) in the age of complex professionalism, requires some creative autonomy as far as the design and creation of a cultural product are concerned, and strong centralised control when it comes to content distribution and circulation. Cultural industries protect the independence and originality of creative activities by ensuring a relative autonomy for creatives (directors, writers, musicians, etc.). However, control steps in sharply during the promotion, distribution, and circulation stages through global marketing activities. The economic significance of control over content circulation is especially important in the film industry, where promotion and advertising (P&A) costs have increased consistently from the late 1980s throughout the 1990s and over the past decade. In 2003, P&A costs for a Hollywood film were approximately 39 million dollars, only 50 per cent of which were later recovered with box office profits (Hesmondhalgh, 2003: 233). The marketing costs for the sequel *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) exceeded 100 million dollars (Menand, 2005: 85).

The introduction of digital media and the dissemination of the internet as a global communication medium have strongly questioned this traditional release model. Today, cultural industries are unlikely to be able to control content dissemination on the internet autonomously, as online distribution is becoming increasingly important. From this point of view, the entry of technological players into this media scenario is a significant novelty. These players may do not produce content directly, as media corporations do, but serve as *aggregators*, digital platforms for managing and distributing online content. Examples include Apple Music, Spotify for the music market, Vevo, YouTube etc. Other players such as SVOD platforms

(Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Video etc.) may also produce their own original content such as fiction series with reference to the quality television model of the HBO network (Tryon, 2015).

According to Angus and Thelwall (2010), internet and Web 2.0 communication tools, social networking, and the media content business place new players at the centre of the distribution and communication processes. Platforms, such as Spotify for music or Netflix for movies, develop systems that collect and distribute a wide range of digital content from various internal and external sources. These platforms are also developing APIs (Application Programming Interfaces), which allow digital content providers and purchasers to carry out transactions within the aggregator's platform.

'Content is [the] king' as they kept saying in creative industries (DeFillippi and Wikström, 2014, xii): recent data have shown that, although the ownership of content remains important, new players do not necessarily need to create their own. It is much more strategic for them to develop new online platforms to distribute and manage third-party content. Moreover, digital users are generally 'agnostic' towards the means with which the content is viewed (TV, computer, tablet, or smartphone). Therefore, it becomes increasingly important for content creators to implement a transmedia approach, which allows the distribution and circulation of products in different forms and different platforms. This does not exclude the possibility for an emerging and powerful group of players that distribute cinema and TV series online, such as Amazon, Netflix and Hulu, to invest in the production of original films and series and compete with film and TV studios (Cunningham and Silver, 2013). This research underlines how many creatives are shifting towards new media to submit their ideas. Moreover, the integration of social media enables these new players to identify and analyse public trends at a low cost. Social media provide an enormous amount of information regarding the taste and behaviour of a differentiated audience. This information is used to create increasingly sophisticated and pervasive marketing strategies.

Media content distribution and communication becomes strategic because even the *disruptive* role of dominant technologies is central to the creation of opportunities for new production and consumption models. This does not necessarily mean that technological players, such as Google or Amazon, will overtake historic media industries, but it does outline a reshaping of production and communication in the field of cultural content, where new players and processes are emerging in full force.

Co-creation processes and the web

The mass media of the twentieth century could be said to have relegated amateur and collaborative creations (peer production) to the margins or fandom phenomena – complementary but secondary to the logic and processes of cultural industries – (Boccia Artieri 2012; Jenkins 2006a). Dissimilarly, the media landscape of the twenty first century experienced the irruption of *prosumers*, who became a driving force for innovation and participation in the creation and dissemination of cultural content.

Regardless of the *apocalyptic* or *integrated* evaluation, of the quality and intrinsic value of bottom-up participation, the shape of media of the twentieth century and the current one appear to be very different. In the twentieth century, broadcasters (radio, cinema, TV, publishing) had the exclusive role of producers and audiences could barely interact with/in global communication platforms as 'final user'. Conversely, nowadays, there is a growing involvement of the public in open media content production and consumption processes on the web. It is the rise of what Castells calls 'mass self-communication' (Castells, 2009), that is the opportunity to express opinions, messages and products of individual creativity across open and potentially global communication networks. The Web 2.0 and enabling technologies are opening spaces for public expression and social sharing as never before. The convergence of institutional culture and peer culture is not limited to any uniformity in the choice of one channel – the web – rather than another. It also shows how online audiences are reshaping mainstream trends claiming autonomous areas of creativity and participating in the production of media content. As Jenkins (2006a) had already pointed out, this phenomenon is not new but has always characterised cultural socialisation processes in the complex relation between high culture and pop or folk culture. For a long time, media have insisted on this dichotomy, underpinning the boundaries between cinema, television, literature and other forms. However, in recent times, the web has blurred these boundaries, making access to content production much easier, and mixing genres and aesthetic options in the search for new communication languages and formats. YouTube, the web's most popular video aggregator, is a perfect example of all this. Anonymous videomakers can freely access a global platform where they can publish their videos and obtain great visibility, thanks to the spread of viral distribution on social media. Popularity gained on social media often leads peers to be directly co-opted by media corporations to submit their ideas for mainstream media. The case of the vlogger Lonelygirl11, (Burgess and Green, 2009: 26–8) or Italy's 'The Jackal'[6] are perfect examples.

A similar phenomenon has hit the literary world with *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Jones 2014). The popular novel was originally posted as a fanfiction inspired by the 'Twilight' series posted on the blog of the woman who would later become the author of the trilogy. The content soon took an erotic turn, involving thousands of fans, who broadened the narrative lines of the first version of the fanfiction. A few months later, the author decided to rewrite the fans' content and publish the product with a digital publisher. The success was huge. The book was re-released by a more prestigious publishing house and was soon followed by a trilogy and a globally distributed film. Recently, author E.L. James announced the sequel to the trilogy from Grey's perspective.

On the one hand, we have increasing trends towards co-creation, that is open participatory processes of media content creation. However, on the other, we can notice an opportunistic tendency, which does not respect the enhancement or the true value of outsiders' creativity.

In consideration also of the economic opportunities of such a situation, the answer to these trends should imply a more attentive organisation and management of talents and creative content. In other words, co-creation platforms should integrate openness and recognise and protect individual creativity in online peer production.

Disintermediation/Mediation and new digital intermediaries

In my opinion, digital disruption and the rise of co-creation processes online are the main factors linked to two emerging trends that characterise cultural industry productions in the age of convergence. There is a progressive disintermediation between production and consumption processes outlined in the growing role of co-creation both within an industrial production logic and as a phenomenon per se. However, there is also the need to identify new forms of mediation to manage and protect peers' creativity.

Another factor that leads to the definition of new digital intermediaries is related to the possibility of somehow anticipating the public's taste and trends. As we know, the economic risks associated with creative and cultural production are high. Following the Pareto *power law*, it has been stated that the ratio 80/20 also affects cultural products' profits:out of eighty novels produced in the publishing field, only twenty will be sure to have enough success to cover investment costs. The same trend can be noticed in films and TV programmes with slightly higher percentage rates for cinema (Neuman, 1991: 139). The risks associated with these markets have been used to explain Hollywood producers' blockbuster strategies. These tend to limit the risks related to new productions by developing media franchises (for example comics, books and video games) from hits that can always count on an enthusiastic fan base (such as DC Comics or Marvel titles).

Conversely, Anderson states that the proliferation of digital technologies and communication networks – which make access to and distribution of cultural products inexpensive – have reduced the overall cost of producing new titles significantly:

> The theory of the Long Tail can be boiled down to this: our culture and economy are increasingly shifting away from a focus on a relatively small number of hits (mainstream products and mar kets) at the head of the demand curve, and moving toward a huge number of niches in the tail. In an era without the constraints of physical shelf space and other bottlenecks of distribution, narrowly targeted goods and services can be as economically attractive as mainstream fare. But that's not enough. Demand must follow this new supply. (. . .) The Long Tail starts with a million niches, but it isn't meaningful until those niches are populated with people who want them'
>
> (Anderson, 2006: 52).

In other terms, online network efficiency in terms of distribution, make it easier to reach small communities of consumers (e.g. brand communities) with goods and cultural products even if they're not a market top-seller. Amazon is a common example of the Long Tail model at work: the online retailer earns more on millions of sales of products to many different niche markets over a long period of time than selling 'blockbuster' or 'top-products 'to a limited number of buyers in a short time period.

Co-creation platforms may then serve as intermediaries with respect to the Long Tail model especially with respect to the following issues:

- they represent micro digital platforms both for an efficient production and distribution of cultural products commissioned by the media companies. The limited fixed initial costs for platforms, such as Tongal or Userfarm are due to the fact that production is delegated to creatives taking part in contests, who receive a cash prize established at the beginning of the process. At the same time, the prized contents could be distributed through the same platform online.
- Besides, the openness of these environments – whose relations with users are based on collaboration and social networking – can develop a solid and enthusiastic fan base (brand communities) to promote their productions and expand their markets. In this sense the platforms represent niche markets where products are created and could be also become popular.

In the Long Tail scenario, all creative projects can get market yields thanks to their ability to grab the attention of a specific, specialised audience and generate sales.

The debate on the possibility for crowdsourcing to become a significant opportunity for content creators and independent producers and whether such innovations can generate market alternatives to blockbuster strategies is still open. The role of these platforms as new *digital intermediaries* is emerging into full force. The integration of co-creation processes, with the possibility of organising the production and communication of creative content, can limit the risks associated with taste trends and the fragmentation of the online audience.

Video co-creation platforms

The earliest experiments with video co-creation emerged in the advertising and marketing field with contests launched by major brands. Examples include L'Oreal's contest on Current TV, Doritos' Crash The Superbowl contest[7] and Chevrolet's initiative that allowed users to customise Tahoe ads on their website (similar to the experiment launched by Fiat for the new Fiat 500) (Wexler, 2011). Brands were allowing users to post their creative ideas on their websites and social networks. Participation was (and in most cases still is) free and open to everyone. Most of the times, online visibility of a creative product legitimised by a prestigious brand was the only reward. Originally, these contests were not designed to select creative talents, but to drive traffic and create buzz around their brands. In fact, these marketing campaigns were managed and controlled by advertising agencies with the aim of improving the visibility and reputation of the brands and drive customer loyalty. These co-created videos were often posted on dedicated YouTube channels, thereby improving brand visibility on social networks.

However, over the past few years, the number of contests awarding cash prizes to produce audiovisual content has grown significantly (**Fig. 1**). This has led to the creation of platforms for promoting contests, organising creative processes and selecting the best products. Various creative enterprises – including advertising (Wexler, 2011), film production (Ferrer-Roca, 2014) photography and television (Leminen et al., 2014) – have used co-creation platforms not only to improve brands' visibility on the web, but also to select and enhance the value of user-generated creative products. The following table shows how the number of contests on co-creation platforms has increased continuously from 2006 to 2011, whereas the number of contests on social media has gradually decreased.

Roth and Kimani (2014) highlight how, of all the forms of creative expression, video contests are the ones that attract the highest number of brands, prizes, and talents. Contests ensure low-cost, high-quality products, turning out to be more than just a marketing tool. Platforms, such as Userfarm, Tongal, Filmaka and Audiodraft, put famous brands in contact with creatives who are willing to take part in contests with original content very rapidly. In other words, they serve as digital intermediaries opening new market opportunities for creative work and developing new rules, procedures and relations. In addition to co-creation

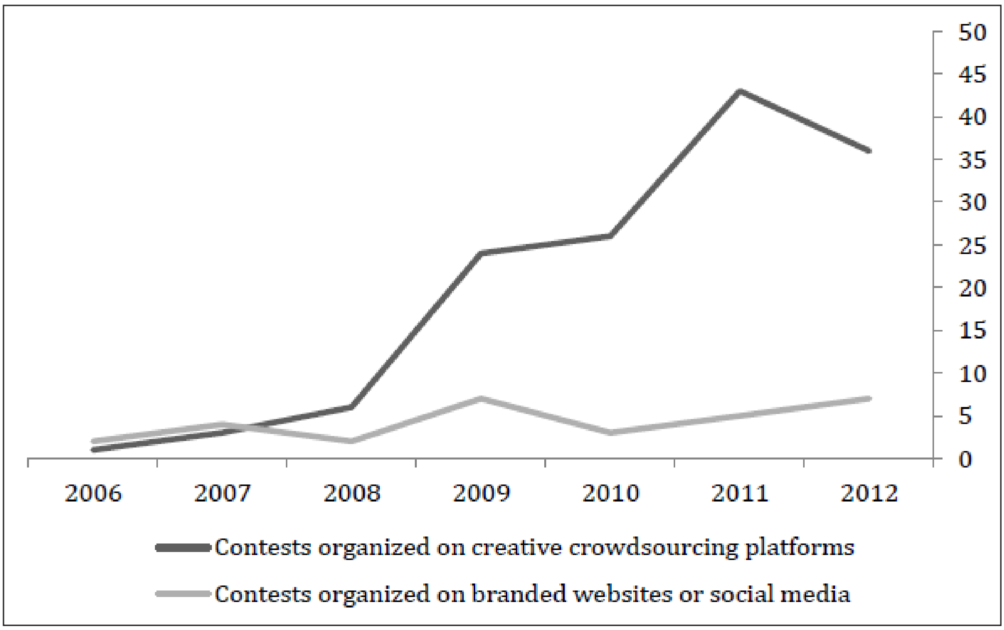

Figure 1: Typology of online contests. Source: (Roth and Kimani, 2014).

aimed at producing content for the advertising and film markets, there are similar experiences where production is not-for-profit and has purely aesthetic purposes. The most representative example is the 2012 tribute to Johnny Cash made possible by the voluntary contribution of hundreds of fans. The Johnny Cash Project collected original drawings inspired by the artist's life and work, which became a part of the music video for the song 'Ain't No Grave'. The aesthetic result was of great impact. Other examples include the *Twittamentary* project – the Twitter documentary created with crowdsourced creative content – and *Italy in a day* (2014), Gabriele Salvatores' day-in the-life October 2013 documentary project made possible thanks to the participation of hundreds of videomakers.

Other co-creation platforms, such as Makeastar, select live performances in a similar way as TV talent shows. The most interesting ones select videos and films created by the best talents and promote them through traditional distribution circuits, such as film festivals, as in the case of Filmaka.

Organisation of creative production in video co-creation platforms

The second stage of this empirical analysis has uncovered recurring forms in the organisation of creative production in co-creation platforms (Table 1 in Annex). We can highlight two main types of creative production: *contest based* (yellow/orange) and *open collaboration based* (pink/green), which cover the entire sample. Contest based productions refer to creative audio and visual content resulting from various types of contests (open or private). These contests usually award cash prizes and aim at providing marketing and advertising solutions (e.g. Tongal and Userfarm) or produce short films and documentaries (e.g. Filmaka and Amazon Studios). On the other hand, open collaboration platforms develop collaborative projects for making films and video documentaries on a not-for-profit basis. The platforms highlighted in green work in a similar way but for audio content. Vocalo, for example, is a radio station that broadcasts user-generated content.

The main differences between aggregators (e.g. YouTube) and co-creation platforms are the following:

- the central role of the project: users take part in a defined project. This is a common element of platforms where the end product is paid for, and those (e.g. Twittamentary), that create collective work;
- the cash prize defined at the beginning of the process (of which the platform is the main intermediary);
- the contest mechanism that regulates the selection of creative products through a transparent process.

Roth and Kimani (2014) identify the following types of contest in the advertising field, which adapt perfectly to the audiovisual and film industry: *idea contests*, *call for pitches*, *simple contests,* and the *stage based contest.* The two main features of these contests are the involvement of creatives in the creation of a video and the client's level of control over the production stages.

> Idea contests only engage the crowd at the early, ideation phase, calls for pitches engage a selected member of the crowd throughout the production process, simple contest task the crowd to accomplish all stages of the procession until submission and stage based contests do the same by incorporating several moments of interaction points between the initiating brand and the crowd.' (Roth and Kimani, 2013: 30).

Most of the analysed platforms make use of simple contests (for example Userfarm, Mofilm, Audiodraft). Brands run contests that are based on an idea that needs to be developed (such as the lightness of a new smartphone model) and reward the best video among those submitted by the users. In this case, their control over the creative process is limited to the evaluation and selection stage, whereas the actual creative process is carried out externally to the platform.

Other platforms, such as Tongal, make use of stage based contests. In this case, the competition is divided into various stages: submission of an idea, pitch, video production and submission of the winning video to an audience that votes for the best creative products. This type of contest allows for greater control over the creative process; in fact, brands can dictate the direction of the entire process to meet their priorities and the audience's expectations. Both the intermediary and the client have control over the process – the former by acting as a guarantor of the creative process, and the latter by selecting the best product during the final stage. Then there is the case of Amazon Studios, which runs stage based contests, where the intermediary – the platform – is also the end client. In fact, Amazon Studios selects the best products and distributes them through Amazon Prime Instant Video, as in the case of shows *Alpha House* or *Mozart in the Jungle*.

Unlike aggregators, such as Vimeo or YouTube, where the selection process is based on the popularity of the content, in co-creation environments the selection framework consists of shared stages established beforehand. On YouTube, it is the 'YouTube-ness' that prevails (Burgess and Green, 2009). You can upload (almost) anything provided that it can be tagged or remixed by anyone any number of times. The best videos are often the most popular ones or those that get shared the most on other social networks. In YouTube, visibility, or rather networking, prevails. The most viral content becomes the 'best' and gets noticed and co-opted by mainstream media. Even so, co-creation platforms are based on a structured organisation of the creative process. This model has a substantially open nature. Most of the analysed contests can be accessed by anyone without having to demonstrate particular expertise or qualifications.

Collaboration and communication tools in co-creation platforms

Co-creation platforms provide tools that help build relations among users and strengthen brand communities. Table 2 in the Annex analyses this dimension through two indicators, namely, the presence (or absence) of collaboration and communication tools in co-creation platforms, and the presence of links to the main social networks (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter etc.) and the frequency with which posts are updated.

Based on the specific features of the sample, it is easy to notice a certain degree of integration between co-creation platforms and social media. Most platforms have a blog linked to social media (Facebook, Twitter, Google+ etc.). Other platforms, which do not have a blog (e.g. Expressinmusic and Makeastar), enjoy plenty of engagement and update their data and content on social media. Data show a solid strategy by digital intermediaries, which consolidates their presence on Facebook and Twitter providing visibility for contests and their winners. Simultaneously, it provides the opportunity for anyone to take part by commenting on posts. This loyalty-building strategy is based on digital curation. Platform intermediaries share content and moderate other users' posts, thereby sparking conversation and driving traffic to the website. The same applies to Vimeo and Google+.

The blogs of these platforms (e.g. Tongal and Userfarm) attract high engagement, especially in terms of networking and professional collaboration among creatives. Userfarm, in particular, is available in five languages and is probably the largest co-creation platform, with offices in several countries. Blogs are specifically designed for creatives who work on these platforms. They serve as an open forum that collects users' comments and ideas and normally have a gallery of the best products selected by the brands. Some blogs integrate tools that promote cooperation among creatives. For example, Mofilm's Crew Builder application is designed to get in touch with people with different competencies and create virtual crews for various contests. These are more than mere communication tools; they are rather professional networking tools.

Another interesting fact, which underlines the role of co-creation platforms as digital intermediaries, is the little or no attention to social activities evident on YouTube. In most of the cases analysed in this article, there is no connection to YouTube and, when there is, the data are obsolete. The most obvious explanation is that YouTube is an important competitor in the audiovisual co-creation market and the web's main aggregator. This reinforces the idea that co-creation platforms can be an advantageous alternative to aggregators, which often focus too much on sharing and networking rather than on recognising and enhancing the value of creative content.

Conclusions

Video co-creation platforms play an important role in the complex convergence scenario.

- They are new digital intermediaries in the cultural production field, which integrate and deal with complex network dynamics and online audience differentiation, thanks to their more flexible organisation compared to that of traditional cultural industries.
- They consolidate an open organisational model for cultural production enhancing the value of a wider participation in the process.
- They are boosting creative production providing peers' contributions with sustainable economic rewards and legal warranty against creative contents exploitation.

These aspects integrate other features related to the value of creative activities, which, according to some, would be levelled downward in co-creation platforms, where intermediaries serve more as gatekeepers than sponsors (Scholz 2012; Fuchs, 2014, Terranova, 2012). The terms *creativity* and *creatives* in online productions are still the subject of significant debate(Lanier, 2010; Lughi and Russo Suppini, 2015) as is the aesthetic or purely instrumental value of expanding participation to unqualified people. The hyper-technological drift of cultural content production and aggregation and the relation with 'dominant technologies', which tend to monopolise the media environment (Langlois and Elmer, 2013; Fuchs, 2010) are other controversial topics. The debate is still open, but the issues are certainly not new in respect to the transformation and innovation dynamics in cultural production processes.

In her classic on the printing revolution in early modern age, Elizabeth Eisenstein describes the essential role that printers' workshops had in scientific and literary innovations. They represented new forms of cultural production organisation that 'changed relationships between men of learning as well as between systems of ideas' (Eisenstein, 1983: 56–60): a set of both organizational and technological transformations generated by the spread of the printing press that were foreign to the institutions and academies traditionally in charge of disseminating knowledge.

The difficulty of analysing and outlining the co-creation phenomenon– as well as other online developments– lies in its constant mobility and inevitable proximity to our subject of study that characterise an ever-evolving field, where trends at any given time can suddenly change or take an unexpected turn. What encourages me to continue in this line of research is the awareness that it contains all the foundational characteristics of the web, specifically openness, the end of the intermediation of twentieth-century mass media, and the enhancement of the role of the peers involved regardless of their social status, ideology and professional background. These characteristics offer resistance against the continuous reshaping of the networks themselves despite and beyond the hype of any given moment.

Supplementary Files

The supplementary files for this article can be found as follows:

- **Supplementary File 1: Annex 1: Crowdsourcing Platform – Global.** http://dx.doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.218.s1
- **Supplementary File 2: Annex 2: Crowdsourcing Platform – Italy.** http://dx.doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.218.s2
- **Supplementary File 3: Tables 1 and 2.** http://dx.doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.218.s3

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

Notes

[1] The Peer To Patent project (www.peertopatent.org) is an online system, which aims at improving the quality of issued patents by allowing the public to provide the Intellectual Property Office (in the UK) with relevant information to assess pending patent applications.

[2] This platform (www.seeclickfix.org) allows citizens to report neighbourhood problems (e.g. public lighting, urban furnishings, and traffic signs) through a constantly monitored open data system. Currently, this system is used in 430 cities across the United States.

[3] This platform (www.innocentive.com) is used by a large number of companies and foundations to collect ideas to solve theoretical and/or technical and scientific issues.

[4] www.mturk.com: Amazon Mechanical Turk is the digital labour platform where thousands of Turkers (registered workers) offer their competencies to perform tasks, such as tagging images, entering data in a database or writing short reviews on a website. These are normally low-budget tasks; nevertheless, this system has received a considerable amount of traffic and aims at expanding to other countries, such as India and China.

[5] This investigation is based on a multiple case scenario. The first step (March–October 2014) was to analyse approximately 70 general crowdsourcing platforms (Annex 1, Annex 2), which included crowdfunding, knowledge discovery and management (Brabham, 2013). The second stage (October 2014–July 2015) focused on platforms dedicated to audiovisual co-creation platforms (Table 1, Table 2). The sample was selected based on the results of a focus group with qualified testimonials (video production professionals) and the use of some of the main crowdsourcing directories, such as crowdsourcing.org. The approach focused on the organizational model and on the social networking aspects related to the platforms.

[6] A group of videomakers from Naples, who have created and produced successful web series for YouTube, the most popular of which is 'Lost in Google'; http://www.huffingtonpost.it/2013/08/12/the-jackal-youtube-lost-in-google_n_3743000.html

[7] Operation Doritos (https://crashthesuperbowl.doritos.com/) was launched in 2006 by Frito-Lay, the American company that produces the famous snack. Fans create their own Doritos advertisement and, each year, at least one of them is aired during the Super Bowl broadcast. In recent years, Doritos has distributed prize money ranging between $ 400,000 and $ 1,000,000 to the Crash the Super Bowl advertisements. Crash the Super Bowl is the world's largest online video contest. In the 2011–2012 edition, Frito-Lay received over 6,100 submissions and awarded prizes for an overall amount of $ 2,125,000. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crash_the_Super_Bowl, Accessed 10 October 2014.

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