independent film futures

Mixa | Design for Democratic Cinema

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independent
film
futures

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abstract

Digitization and democratization of independent cinema

Making and self-distributing high quality films have never been as affordable as they are today. Even films shot on cellphones are celebrated at festivals around the world. This is really empowering for storytellers who don't want to submit to a Hollywood struggle or don't have a big budget for making their film. Filmmaking is now a democratic arena. Even previously silent audiences are now becoming noisy participants in the films that they consume.

But mere accessibility to the resources for production doesn't entirely satisfy passionate creators who want to reach out to audiences far and wide. The Internet's low entry barriers make room for everyone, resulting in a cluttered environment, where the effective discovery of applicable content becomes important. Each member of the networked audience affects the discoverability of content floating around on the web for others, within their own capacity. The audience's emerging role as re-distributers, along with easy tools and resources that allow them to partake in cinema and popular culture, influences the content and format in which cinema is presented on the web.

These premises offered an opportunity to introduce affordances that encourage new degrees of participation. With a focus on the emerging activities of appropriation, a system that honors content creators by making attribution consistent and codified is proposed in this project. The establishment of a culture of crediting welcomes the arrival of a future indie cinema, which is integral to the social nature of the Internet.

table of contents

Filmmakers need to target the right **curators rather than the right audiences.**

Curators are looking for new, creative ways to talk about films.

A system to honor creators and **encourage appropriation.**

Inviting people to join in a new culture around independent cinema.

acknowledgements

"If all would speak, who shall be left to listen?"

[1]

introduction

Development of affordable technology has been a major catalyst to independent filmmaking. Whether it's digital cinematographic cameras that can rival 35mm film quality at affordable prices, or non-linear editing suites that can be used on a regular laptop rather than having to rent professional post-houses, the barriers to entry for filmmaking are dropping drastically. Today, finding and collaborating with crew members such as music composers in another city/country is easily possible and uploading one's film to online services such as youTube or vimeo takes far less time, effort and cost than ever before.

This can be seen both as a problem and opportunity. If it's easier for anyone to make a film, is just about anyone making a film? Now, big budget Hollywood films, independent films, student films and creative videos all compete for the audience's attention from the same platforms on the Internet.

In this crowd how might filmmakers find and target a more specific audience? And how might filmmakers sustain themselves monetarily?

Yet, the flip side of this notion, the availability of tools within everyone's reach and the ability for anyone to say "I can do that too!" is empowering for the same filmmakers.

The Internet, with all the promise it brings with it, appears as an interesting challenge for a graduate design thesis.

My primary goal is to envision the future of the independent film industry, with considerations for where, when and how we could consume films today.

Scope & Domain

This thesis focusses on independent films that live on the Internet rather than those crafted for the film festival circuit. A deeper understanding was needed of how filmmakers approached the various aspects of their work: production, distribution and exhibition in this specific environment - whether they were young filmmakers and film students who likely began their careers on the social web or more experienced filmmakers who were in the process of adapting to it.

influencing literature

In order to familiarize myself with the industry, and diversify the lens through which the problem was framed, the first step was to cover a wide body of literature. Along the way, it has guided my explorations and helped me develop confident hunches about my project.

The portion of texts that influenced my thought process most significantly in this project, are described in this section.
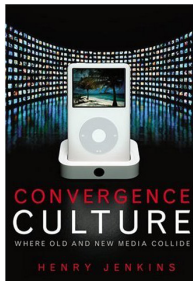
Convergence Culture, Henry Jenkins

This book highlights an environment that is equally accepting of media created by corporations and that created by the masses. Alongside familiar broadcast networks; viewers have been increasingly interested in narrowcast and niche media. This state of affairs is promising a marketplace of free flowing ideas and content which is both inspiring and attractive for consumers to partake in. Today's technologies enable people to easily archive, annotate, appropriate and recirculate content, empowering them to influence their own culture.

While some mainstream producers (prohibitionists) criminalize some forms of fan participation, others (collaborationists) regard fans as grassroots liaisons that provide free publicity. If creators want their works to be "celebrated", they have to allow it to be appropriated as well. With every industry putting so much weight on user experience, audiences can't be expected to view passively from a distance.

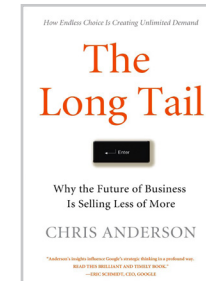The book is a great introduction to the idea of 'participatory culture.' Through the 'anatomy of a knowledge community' around popular TV show 'Survivor', the momentum achieved by fan fiction around Harry Potter and audiences' submergence into the transmedia world of the Matrix, the book sheds light on how media should be designed for the Internet age - to be 'discussed, dissected, debated, predicted and critiqued'.

The Long Tail, Chris Anderson

The economics of the long tail shows the popularity and thus discoverability of content in the non-zero sum world of the Internet. Via this literature, I was able to obtain a macro perspective on the changes occurring in the film industry as a result of digitization.

As mass market transforms into a mass of niches, and access to those niches become inexpensive, our hits-oriented culture begins to disintegrate. For long, viewers have silently accepted the lowest common denominator such as predictable happy endings, due to inefficient distribution. Best-sellers tend to appeal, at least superficially, to a broad range of people while niche products appeal strongly to a narrow set of tastes.

Economist Umair Haque points to the last hundred years of entertainment economics, where the market was run by producers and audiences' attention was wasted. The situation today is reversed where the audiences' attention and time are scarce compared to the content available. We're already seeing a shift in preference in the music industry from mainstream to niche sub genres. Pandora, is an example of a successful service that thrives on the discovery of new music. Similarly, audiences will be more accepting of niche cinema so long as it is accessible through sophisticated search technologies and connections with other viewers on the basis of affinity and personal preference rather than geography.

How Endless Choice Is Creating Unlimited Demand

The
Long Tail

Why the Future of Business
Is Selling Less of More

CHRIS ANDERSON
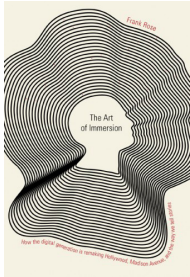
The Art of Immersion, Frank Rose

This book echoes many aspects expressed in 'Convergence Culture,' the main being the blurring concept of 'an audience.' Through multiple examples Rose elaborates on the emerging cultures of the web, which affords deeper audience involvement with films.
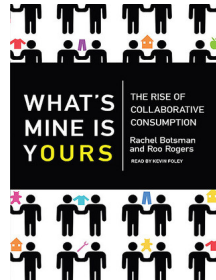
What's Mine is Yours, Rachel Botsman

As the things we consume are dematerializing, our perceptions of ownership are changing. We're more interested in access rather than possessing. This is leading to a higher comfort level with sharing. Yet, it seems that partakers are still fuzzy on the rules of collaborative authorship in the (re) emerging 'gift economy'

Designing Media, Bill Moggridge

This book is an interesting compilation of the early impressions of technologists and designers on the migration of media to the Internet.

Alex Juhasz complains that people who are expressing alternative viewpoints are hard to come by on YouTube where the search function is poor and the site's objective is to push the most popular content to the front.

Tim Westergen of Pandora talked in detail about building a 'music middle class'. "The day your song gets on to Pandora you can leave your day job."

Side-by-Side, Christopher Kenneally

This documentary gave me a filmmaker's take on the transformation of industry. While film is an expensive resource and brought a sense of seriousness to the set, filmmakers believe that it curbs their freedom to experiment, while digital technology does not. Light weight, handheld cameras afford surreptitious shooting angles offering unique points of view to the audience.

"Cinema today is a mixture of art and technology. Moviemakers can no longer just be artists; they will have to learn to be technicians too." - Vittorio Storaro.
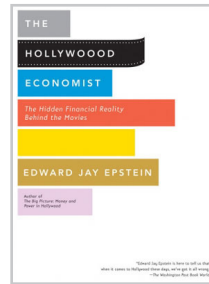
The Hollywood Economist, Edward Jay Epstein

This book revealed the internal functioning of the popcorn economy. It was a useful read to be able to make clear comparisons between Hollywood and the independent film industry.

Hollywood studios, most of which own subsidiary independent studios have their tentacles deep rooted in moneymaking partnerships with multiplexes, TV and retail stores.

As competitors for the audiences' attention, Studio films spend about $30 million in 'audience-creation' and have access to the Nielsen report for competitive positioning to makes sure that they are luring large crowds to the theater. This is absolutely out of the league for a modest independent film. The only aspect in favor of independents is the chance they are able to take on novel and fresh storylines, which big budget blockbusters cannot.

INDIE:
Will not compromise film for audience/money

- Indie of studio but need tve responses from critic, clients, audie...
- looking to make m...

SELF EXPRESSION	SELF EXPRESSION	SELF EXPRESSION	FILM MAKING FREELANCE	CAREER (START)	CAREER (END)
Explore/Creative Be	Document Personal Obsession	Express VIEWPOINT	Regular incoming work (Now + later)	Feature Length Indie/Comm (Future)	Feature Length Indie/Comm. (Soon)
Abstract/Experimental	Abstract Documentary	Documentary.	Shorts: film + video	Film + Video	Film
Wouldn't mind. tve validation from audience	Would like tve audience validation of topic (not necessarily film)	Wants as many ppl to see it ass possible — Cares most abt audience validation	For hire: - Wants client to like it + potential future clients - Validation from audience would be helpful. For self: - Would like (hire) audience validation	- Wants validation from film festival - Would like (hire) audience validation. (recognition)	- Wants validati... from Hollywood - Has audience validation
not concerned abt few 100s advancing	only for internal satisfaction few 100s	concerned w/ professional quality few 10000s	good enough few 100s	max effort few 1000s	max effort 1000,000
not too concerned abt promoting. Making is more imp		⤷ put filmmaking skills to use" teaching	⤷ earn regular income	⤷ become a well-known filmmaker	⤷ become a well-known filmmaker
Online is sufficient	just getting it out of Pittsburgh	- practical abt her capabilities - GOOD ENOUGH 80/20 TAILORED	promotion is overwhelming excuse: "too busy" AVOIDS STRESS/ LAZY		
- not too concerned - making is more imp DOES NOT CARE	- not film but topic - info is logged not promoted doesn't reach out. NO KNOWHOW			STRATEGIC SUCCESSFUL uses all the current tools effectively	OLD SCHOOL targeted at nich... audience GOOD ENOUGH
Qed TV, local CONVENIENCE	acrylic, shells w/ bands, QED TV NON TRADITIONAL MOOD SPECIFIC PART/NOT WHOLE regional	TAILORED, MEANINGFUL national	CONVENIENCE	AMBITIOUS local → national	AMBITIOUS/ SELECTIVE national →

A comparison of the approach and goals of the filmmakers interviewed.

tête-à-tête

Sundance

lead the new wave in cinema

tell a story

document a personal obsession

creative exploration

| first, build a fan base and freelance $$ | get 'buy-in' for personal vision | reach out to the right people | film is one of many media | it would be cool to share |
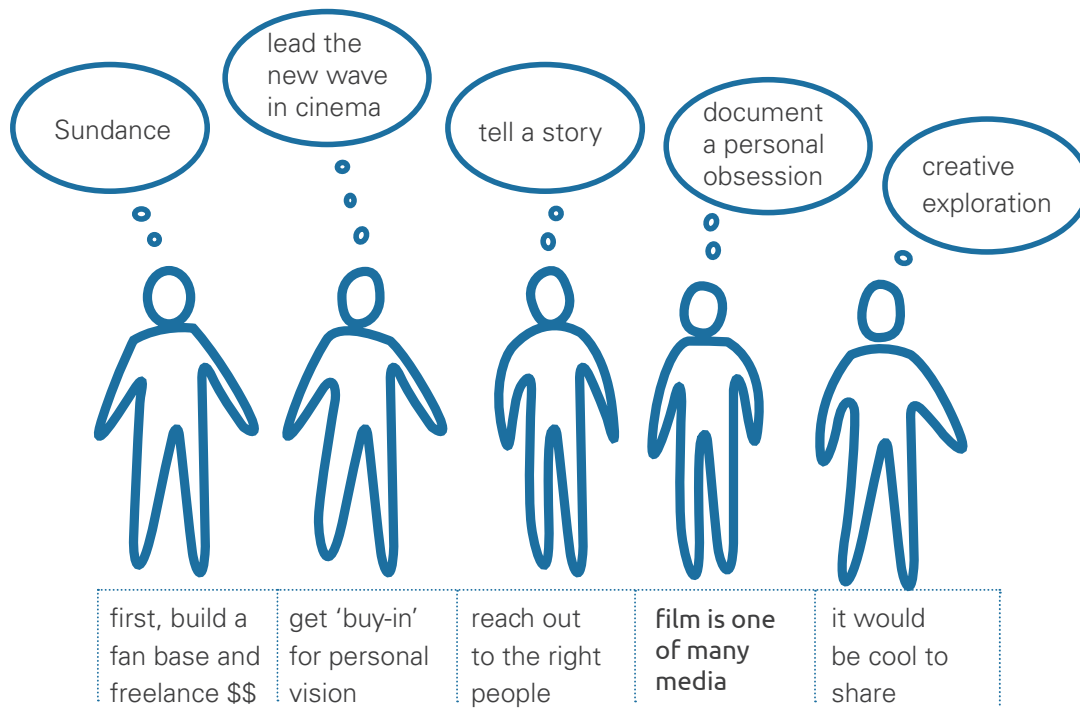
'Pittsburgh Filmmakers' was a great resource for this phase of the project. Interviews with five filmmakers, unique in their goals and output towards filmmaking became a strong foundation on which to build this thesis. Four filmmakers from New York, Chicago, LA and Mumbai, India were included in this first round of interviews to avoid any Pittsburgh biases.

Prior familiarization with each filmmaker's work allowed discussions around specific examples of their work, for clarity.

films you make most
emble..

Narrative/
Fiction

+animation

Abstract/
Experimental

documentary   ← for hire   for myself

02.
Your current budget most
resembles..

In 5 years, your budget will
look like..

How are your movies
funded?

few 100s for
film stock

$0

me

↗ feed the actors

↓ grants

partners (cost + revenue)

↑

Self-support

epic film
50,000

SUNDANCE
$10M

$10,000

+thesal!

External - su
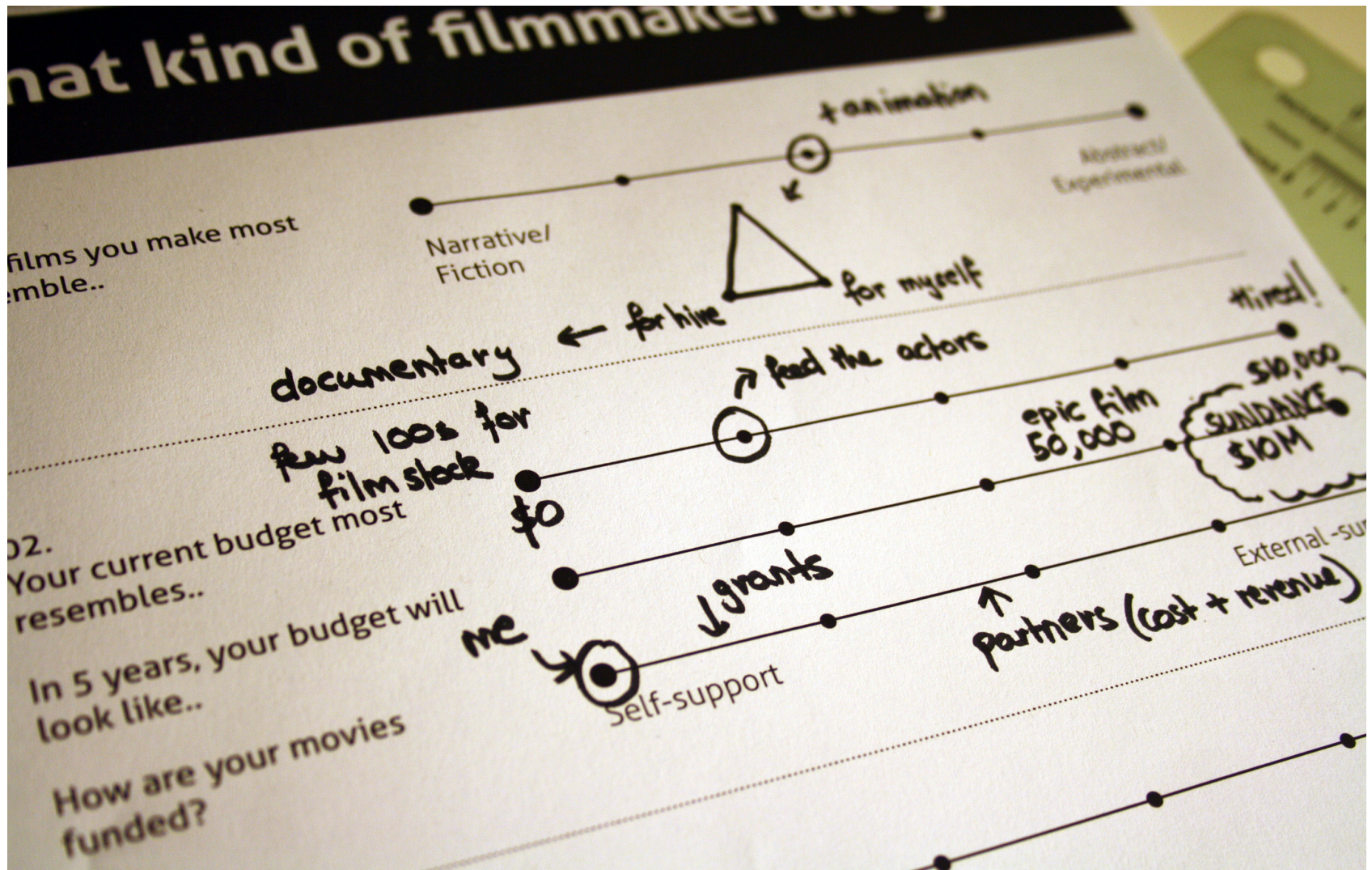
The use of open-ended spectra to assist in asking awkward questions such as production budgets and profits earned avoided assumptions on my behalf and pressure to comply on the behalf of the interviewee.

14

“It's a life type
commitment, but it can't
support a living.”

Insights: Production

Making a film independently

look for
funding

shoot

visual
effects
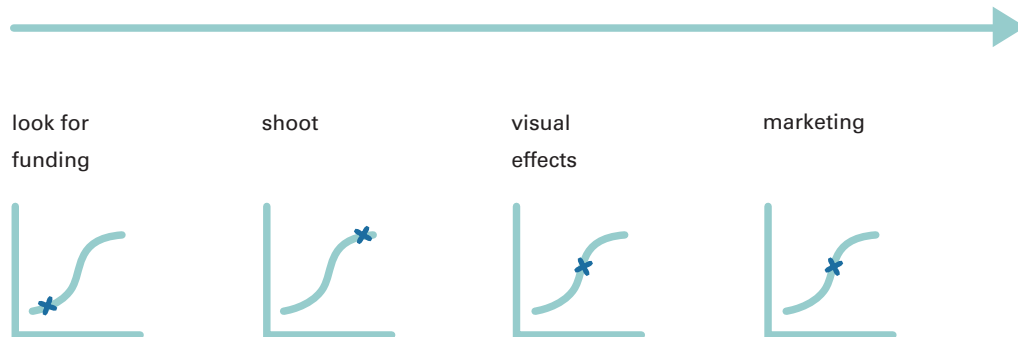
marketing

DIY is liberating, but exhausting

Unable to afford a crew, independent film-
making can be time-consuming for those
who run a one-man show. They not only have
to learn the technicalities of music or visual
effects, but also have to turn into market-
ers and brand ambassadors without formal
training.

Insights: Distribution

Blow your own trumpet

In an attempt to replace the previous channels of distribution, filmmakers are painstakingly self-branding. These efforts however, are dispersed over multiple platforms and hence rendered sub-effective.

"you can't be
  innovative with it"
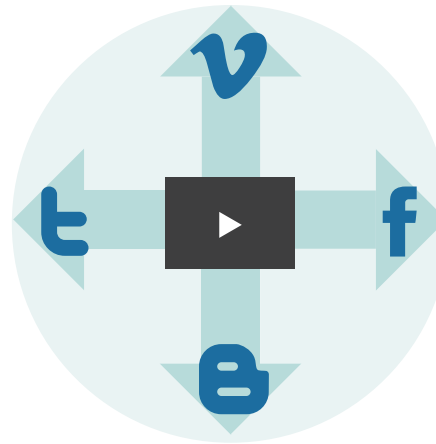
Following is an audit of social media services used by an average filmmaker for self promotion.

4 blogs: 1 to record personal thoughts and activities, 2 for two specific genres of film, and 1 for film reviews.

2 Facebook pages: 1 personal and 1 for his indie film company

2 YouTube channels

A personal website along with Vimeo , IMDb, blip.tv and MySpace accounts.

2 Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn and Google+ accounts

And a Projeqt account to bring it all together

Filmmakers brand their work with self-created genre terms: 'video-essaying' or 'docu-advertising'.

An indie filmmaker's portfolio of work

variety

Goals

Filmmakers were more interested in having more people experience their work. Concerns for monetary gains came in second.

Environment

The city in which a filmmaker works, not only influences the cost of production, standard of production or the subject for the film, but the city's theater culture or the presence of film schools can largely impact the discovery and acceptance of a film.

Insights: Exhibition

While reaching out to wide audiences is a common goal amongst filmmakers, the exhibition platform often takes precedence in a personal measure of success of one's films. This could be because of a long established association of grandeur with the silver screen.

Status associated with site of screening
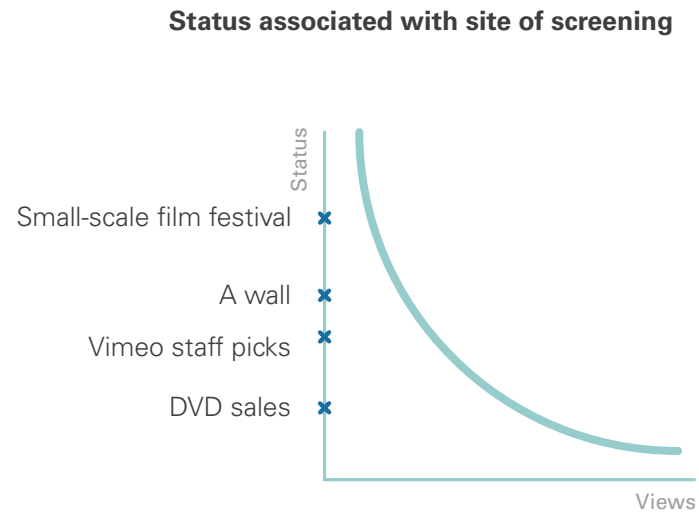
Many filmmakers allude to the importance of finding the right kind of audience for a particular kind of film. For many projects, the search for the right audience starts before the film is completed.

From Silver Screens to Touch Screens

As audiences have opened up to narrowcasting and niche media, their modes of reception have evolved from being individualistic to social. Today's audiences experience content differently because of their potential capacity to participate, even though they might never actually contribute.

the new audience

Henry Jenkins' thoughts on the evolving behaviors of audiences resonated with the direction this thesis was heading in. The examples in his book encouraged me to observe my own shift in behavior, and of those around me, towards film and video content published on the web. Following are some prominent ways in which viewers have evolved.

While some audiences do maintain fan statuses towards popular Hollywood franchises, they're not limited to any one genre. Audiences are willing to experiment and explore works outside their familiarity. Why wouldn't they? Niche content is easily available, now that our world isn't zero-sum anymore.

The paradox of choice however, stands proven. The more options available to audiences, the less satisfied they've grown. With over 72 hours of video uploaded to YouTube every minute [2], audiences can't be blamed for being choosy. There is no need for anyone to sit through any video that isn't powerful enough to hold his or her attention. There are too many alternatives, and they are within such easy reach.

It's both exciting and challenging at the same time that the audience's vote is not obviously predictable. Films with high production values are not always the ones to rope in the largest audiences anymore. It's hard to know what will click with audiences.

It is also true that audiences are no longer silent, but are noisy and opinionated instead. Whether they're experts or not, whether someone is listening or not, audiences are expressing their support or rejection for films (music, books and even the political system) on their Facebook and twitter pages.

opportunities

What's important? What's interesting?

Multi-motive Participatory Culture

A redefinition of the roles and responsibilities of filmmakers and audiences, supported by the social potencies of the web, could spur new and diverse ways in which movies could be made. Future practices could even influence what movies might look like – whether they retain the video format or take on new forms that still employ the storytelling and visual skills of today's filmmakers.

COLLABORATIVE FILMMAKING

Co-Creators
Pros
Amateurs
Crowds
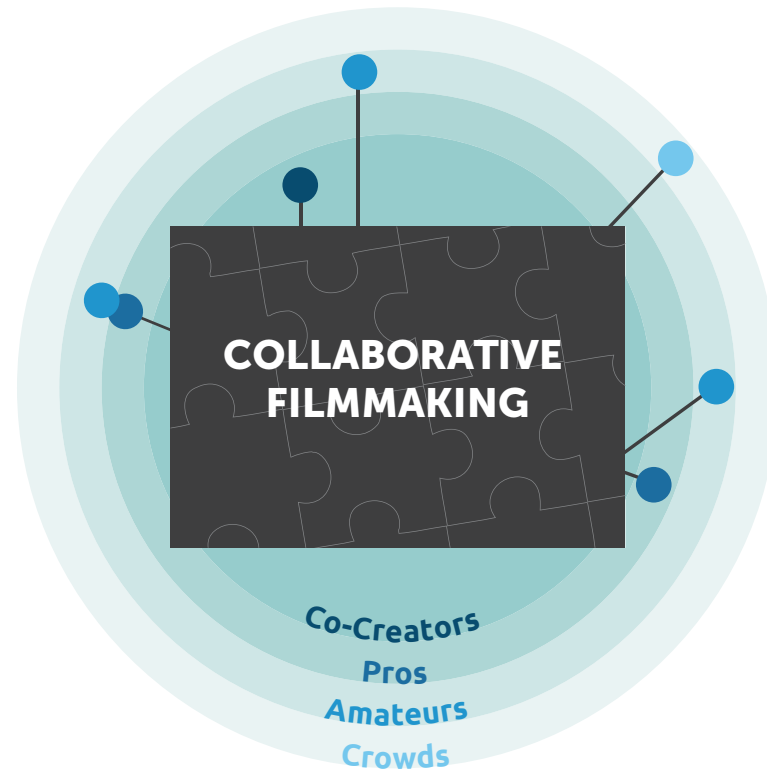
Co-Creators invest

Pro supporters contribute Technical experts, other filmmakers fans

Amateur supporters dig deeper Fans, film Students

Crowds sample Passive audiences, aspiring filmmakers, film critics

DIY With Others

Today's technologies allow us all to show, connect, teach, self-teach, annotate and appropriate content. If the Web is going to remain the most accessible and affordable platform for experimentation, it is interesting to further explore the flexibility it can offer.

Possibilities for Collaboration

There was an opportunity to nurture an environment that offered value to both fans as well as producers, rather than leaving the former empty handed. Through a master apprentice model, an independent filmmaker could allow other budding artists some creative freedom to remake his/her film and tell the story in their own way to an audience of their choosing.

While newcomers get an existing foundation as a starting point, along with mentorship from the filmmaker, they in turn, lead their audiences to the original film thus popularizing it. This opportunity could be addressed through the lens of service design.

What if this concept was further extended to buying/selling or even bartering components of a film? These could be in the form of original soundtrack or B-roll footage from another country where the filmmaker might not be able to travel. It could even become a community for finding appropriate collaborators based on their very niche skills. Within the field of documentaries, filmmakers could accept research findings from the masses, keeping them engaged from very early stages of the filmmaking process.

early hunches

The second semester was kick started with a rapid brainstorm of 150 ideas focussed on collaboration as follows:

How might indie filmmakers get the right film to the right audience at the right time?

How might indie filmmakers get the right contributors with the right skills at the right time?

A quick categorization of the 150 ideas, revealed these emerging themes:

A variety of methods for **previewing** a film could reduce the fear of disappointment and thus give audiences a boost of confidence to explore genres outside their familiarity.

Search filters to find films online, need to be more specifically tuned to incorporate the various aspects that this medium has to offer. Today, we search by title or browse by genre, but factors such as mood or pace, which often affect our regard for a film are ignored. Leveraging social sentiment can make these search mechanisms more sensitive and more satisfying.

What could **audience engagement** look like if they had more of a prominent say in the films they were watching presently, rather than merely sharing their opinion afterwards.

'son propre film'- the movie in his head

From observing my own behavior as an audience and of those around me, I knew that audiences today don't just sit through any film or video content that appears on their screen. The content has to hold their attention in some meaningful way or else they simply move on to the next video on the list. Owing to such behaviors, it's not uncommon to witness responses to films as follows: "It's nice, but it could have been much shorter?" Or, "I hated that end, I wish..."

With respect to our decreasing tolerance to online material due to an abundance of choice, it was interesting to explore how consumers might bring movies under their own control, to meet their own personal preferences if technological feasibility was not an issue. In a quick attempt to broadly and thought-provokingly visualize this notion, a few scenarios were developed. These describe what an audience's involvement in film and video could look like.

Violence

STELLA BELLA
RERERTERE DE JEDI

01

Cody isn't going to read the same bedtime story night after night. He needs something that can keep up with his imagination.

Whenever Cody loses interest in a movie, he drags and drops his favorite characters from other cartoons into the current one he's watching. In this way, he puts together a narrative arc that keeps his interest level high.

On days when Cody is lazy himself, he watches new and unexpected versions of the original movie, created by other kids just like him.

02

Karina and Darren are planning date night. As always, Darren is preparing dinner while Karina is preparing the movie.

Tonight though, Darren's putting together a very special meal. Karina wants to return the favor, so she tweaks Darren's favorite movie to double the violence quotient. Also, he's seen the film so many times, that she shuffles some scenes at the end and hopes that Darren will enjoy these twists in the plot.

03

Poor Ms. Eleanor! If the two students that accidentally signed up for her Latin elective this semester drop the course, she will lose her job.

Lucky for her though, technology is all too easy! She pulls up the movie 'Return of the Jedi' on her phone and begins recording latin voice-overs for it. "Revertere de Jedi" is ready in time for class and Ms. Eleanor hopes that her students enjoy it.
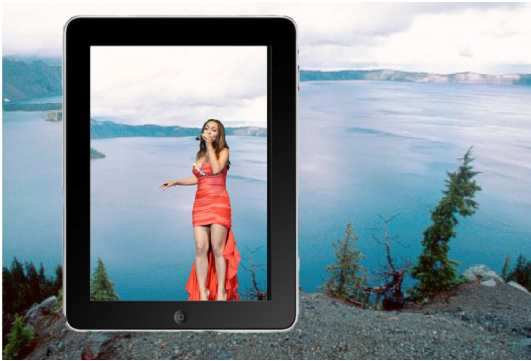
04

Ed has promised himself time off the grid, so he's camping in the mountains to find some peace and quiet. It's really beautiful out here, but there's one small problem, he's kind of bored.

So he cheats… and decides to catch up on the new episodes of American Idol. He turns on the green-screen mode on his device. The singers on the show now appear to be standing in the picturesque surroundings captured by his camera, rather than on the brightly lit American Idol stage. "Aah.. This is relaxing" thinks Ed, tapping to the beats, as the sun sets in the backdrop.
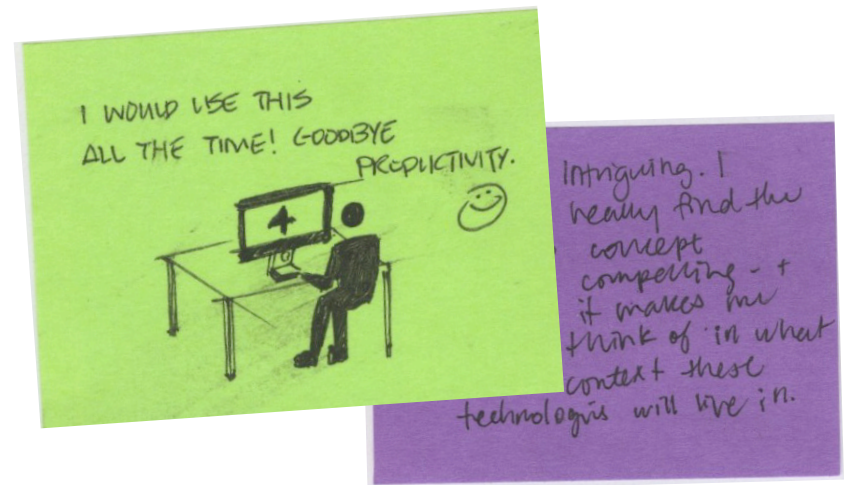
Response to the scenario ideas presented at my Designing Fictions class

These ideas were by no means random. All the afore-mentioned scenarios have a root in current audience involvement with regards to films on the Internet. Following are a range of examples that I collected over a few weeks time.

evidence of audience involvement

Interaction

This interactive ad featuring Terry Crews playing instruments with his muscles was created for Old Spice by Wieden+Kennedy. It collected over 1.5 million views [3]. The ad has an interactive component as well, that allows viewers to record their own music tracks and subsequently share them via Vimeo.

Muscle Music obeyed the rules of Internet absurdity to earn widespread virality. Even though this was a corporate campaign and it only admitted a superficial level of involvement from audiences, the ability to participate was a strong factor for audiences to give the brand and video their attention.

Francis Coppola presented his latest, 'Twixt' an interactive film at Comic Con 2012 [5]. It is an experiment where music can be altered and sequences can be shuffled around in real-time response to audiences. This form is beginning to be known as 'Malleable Cinema.'

Contribution

Hi friends, I just backed my dear friend Shuchi Talati's film. It's an amazing story. Don't believe me, watch the video on Kickstarter, and help the team out! http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/69061341/guttersnipes-feature-film-set-in-arkansas-0

GUTTERSNIPES (Feature Film set in Arkansas)
www.kickstarter.com
A grounded, uplifting story of a homeless teen girl who finds an abandoned 12 year-old autistic girl on the street.

Under the broad umbrella term of 'crowd sourcing', falls the model of 'crowd funding' popularized by Kickstarter, Indiegogo and Seed&Spark. In exchange for a modest donation, crowds receive some film-related merchandise, along with bragging rights of being partial financers to a film.

While crowd funding is really revolutionizing independent filmmaking today, the main criticism for Kickstarting film projects has been this: A bulk of the support comes from the filmmaker's personal networks [6].

'East of Liberty' is a film by Pittsburgh based filmmaker Chris Ivey who followed a different model of gathering contributions from his audience. Ivey screened his film in chaptered increments, in between which he held fundraising campaigns [7]. After each chapter, local coverage and murmur about the film helped Ivey collect donations for the next. This worked because his target audience wasn't the entire world on the Internet, but residents of East Liberty and Pittsburgh who had a deep-rooted passion in this topic area.

Collaboration

Crowd-sourced films leverage creative contributions from the crowd and not just funds. One example of this is Cloud Filmmaking initiated by filmmaker Tiffany Shlain. In a series titled Let it Ripple: Mobile Films for Global Change, Shlain shared her script with people across social media and asked them to respond with artwork that they felt best represented her script [9]. She received an overwhelming number of responses in multiple languages from all over the globe. She entitled this endeavor 'cloud filmmaking', in regard to the new tools and technologies that enable ease of video sharing.

Another example of a collaborative film is 'Life in a Day'. It is a crowd-sourced documentary, which drew 80,000 clips i.e. 4,500 hours of footage from 192 countries around the world via YouTube submissions [10]. 'Life in a Day' director Kevin Macdonald claims to have used the themes emerging from the contributions as a framework for his narrative.

In both examples, even though the masses were given the freedom of interpretation, there was also a specific constraint provided. Contributors to 'Life in a day' had to recount events that happened on the particular day, July 24, 2010. These films pose an interesting

dichotomy: Even though the films are known for their collaborative format, and all partakers are technically entitled to the role of creator, the project still remained the script, direction and experiment of one person. And even though the project was instructed and completed by one person, it involved a number of strangers who were equally invested in the final piece.

Life in a day [11]
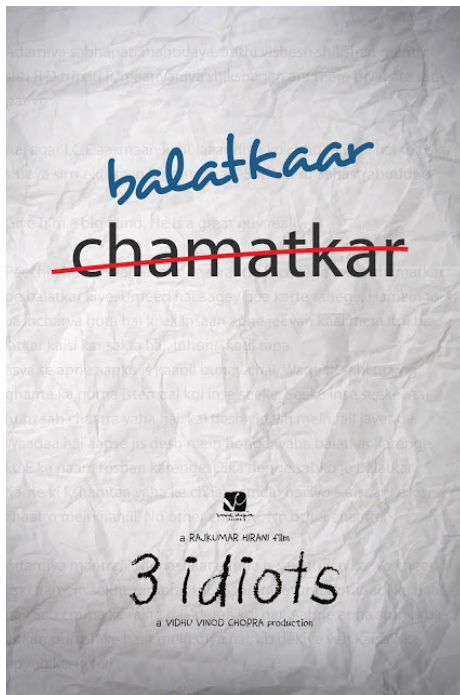
Creation and Re-creation

There is a variety of work that borders the territory of fan fiction; except it is not underground anymore, it is showcased and spread instead. While this work references mainstream material, the work is incredibly creative and can safely be called original. My favorite example in this space is a series of musicals created by the brothers behind AVByte: Antonius and Vijay Nazareth. When asked whether they were professional or amateurs, they answered that they considered themselves "professional YouTubers".

Visual designer Akshar Pathak generates a series of posters of well-known Bollywood blockbusters. He first began showcasing his work through a Facebook album titled Minimal Bollywood Posters, referring to the minimal aesthetic style he uses. With an average of 750 Facebook likes per poster, Pathaks designs have resonated so well with viewers that he has built a strong fan base in a very short time.

[12]

While both sets of work frequently piggyback on mainstream themes: Disney Princesses, Game of Thrones or Super Mario for AVByte and commercial Bollywood for Pathak, their pieces reflect an individual take on familiar topics. Both AVByte and Pathak would not have been able to garner the audience they did or be so well acknowledged, so early in their careers if it wasn't for the social media platforms to stage their talents and spread their word.

Come be a Hipster!

Participation

'Girl with the chewing gum' is the work of avant-garde filmmaker John Smith in 1976 [15]. Although at first it seems that the voice in this film is directing the scene, the voice over was actually added afterwards to regular footage of a busy London street. Today it is more common to come across mixes, remixes and mash-ups in a number of varieties.

People's attempts at manipulating different types of media were definitely their way of participating in popular culture around them.

'Girl with the chewing gum' - John Smith [14]

'Slowed-down' version of a song from the TV show Glee [16]

40

Downfall /Hitler Reacts/ Know your memes
On a 'Make your own Hitler video' link anyone can easily write their own subtitles to manipulate the reason for Hitler's anger. It really couldn't be any easier.

Herron Hitler Rants About NGs [17]

I'll just wear my new flannel shirt

What makes all of these examples really interesting is that these are all voluntary forms of participation.

Situating the idea of collaboration and participation in a new perspective made it apparent to me that the roles of the filmmaker and audience were not distinct anymore they were becoming interchangeable. I talked about audiences being experimental, social and participatory, **but not all audiences are the same**. Some are more passionate about films, while others care more about social interactions. Their investment could differ based on topic or genre of the film or their own availability of free time. Audiences also have a varying ability to participate in cultural dialogue around film, owing to their technical or artistic background.

Forrester's Ladder of Participation

spectrum of participant profiles between
content consumers and producers
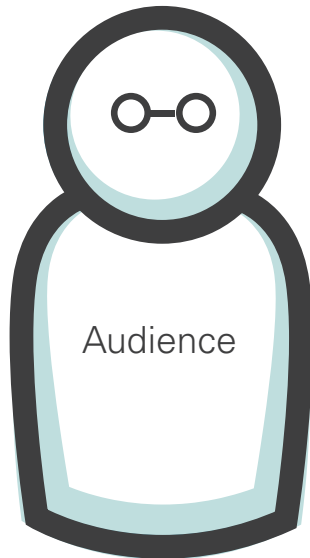
Distribute

Audience

Filmmaker

Discover

spectrum of participant profiles

Horowitz Media Pyramid [18]

There seemed to be a spectrum of intermediary profiles, owing to the different degrees to which people participate, between the profile of a filmmaker and a passive audience or a content producer and content consumer. I needed to understand their motivations, needs and functions within the larger ecosystem.

After referencing existing models of engagement, the most relevant being Forrester's ladder of social technographic profiles and the Horowitz media pyramid, I identified an equivalent spectrum of profiles for film audiences.

Situating the ladder of participation in between the two initial stakeholders, filmmakers and audiences, allowed for the question to be addressed from each end. **Now, instead of merely observing how filmmakers distribute to the right audience, it was worth taking a closer look at how audiences might discover their kinds of films?**
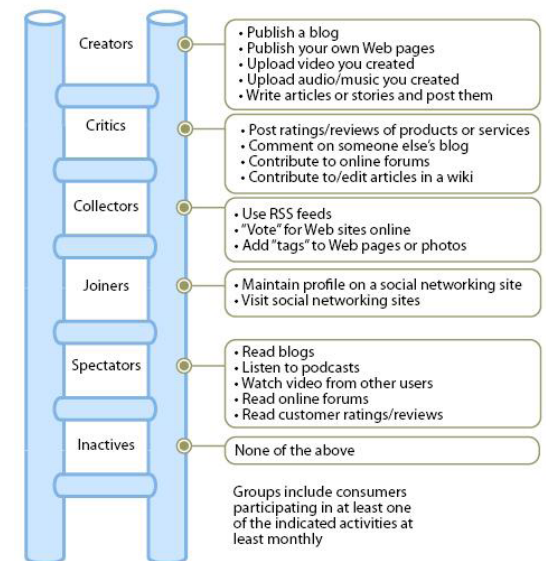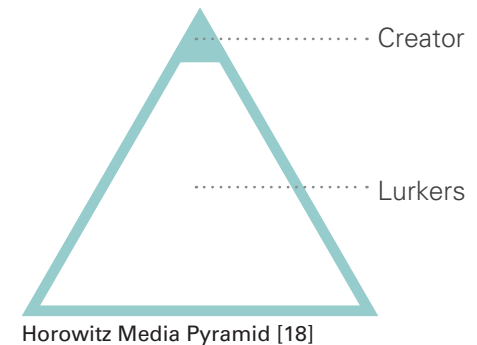
Forrester's ladder of social technographic profiles [19]

The interesting part of the equation though, is that these different types of audience members are networked. And so, they have the ability to influence each other.

Network = User^2

The inclusion of more and more members increases the value to all the other users exponentially. With an increasing number of users expressing their opinion on films, collaborative filtering would produce increasingly sophisticated results for all. [20]

Digital discovery

As an outcome of democratization, there are millions of films and videos fighting for the audience's limited time and attention. How does one forage so much information to find the most suitable material? There are various cues and clues that can be picked up along the way to help consumers discover the most interesting areas. These are highlighted in a framework that is abbreviated as TLC: Trying Out, Links and Community [21]. This became even more useful to me when I saw a potential alignment with the long tail curve that I head read about in the early weeks of my thesis. The following is my version of TLC, reordered here as LCT.
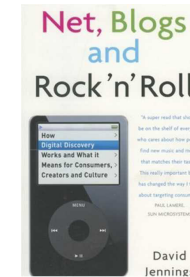
Net, Blogs and Rock 'n' Roll,
David Jennings
Through the lens of the digitization of the music industry, this text digs deep into the details of discovery in the digital environment with an equal focus on consumers, creators and overall culture as well.

The most useful materials in the book were the multiple frameworks for categorizing and understanding the nature of different audiences and their activities. The textures of the film and music industries are close enough for me to draw out useful parallels.

Discovery Across the Long Tail

Links | **Community** | **Trying Out**
Media | Social | Idiosyncratic
Hype | Recommendations | Curiosities

No. of views

Popularity

Horowitz Media Pyramid
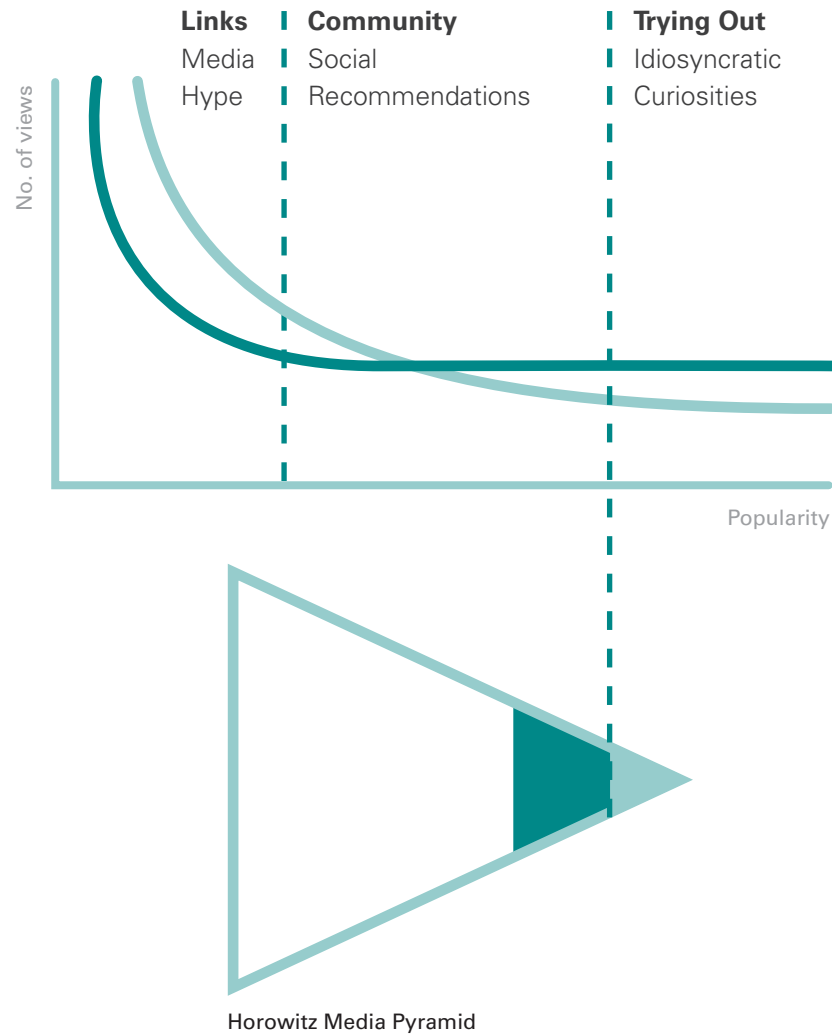
Can discovery be improved
by encouraging participation?

Links

The Internet is built on links. Hollywood productions can afford to be at the head of the curve because they heavily advertise their links and overshadow others. Discovering this hyped material is not hard. Most people are easily convinced to watch these extravagant productions, which are tailor made for wide appeal.

Community

Audiences like to be in the know of what their friends and neighbors are watching. Friend recommendations mean more to most, than impersonal expert recommendations. Additionally, within the gift economy that exists on the Internet today, many volunteers contribute towards organizing information for the common good. Social tagging is an example that obliquely improves search results for a wide variety of media. With direct and indirect input from the community, interested audiences are able to move further down the curve and away from mainstream films.

Trying out

Scouting the Internet to discover the work of new and emerging filmmakers reflects a self-driven approach of discovery to satisfy one's own idiosyncratic curiosities. Dedicated fans make the time and effort to track their favorite filmmakers and learn about their new projects. These are the few who discover content located at the very end of the long tail.

Following in music's footsteps

In congruence with Moore's law, films are undergoing the digitization that music went through a few years ago. Project Phoenix was a research initiative by a media company called Emap in 2003 and 2005 [21], to learn about different kinds of audiences for the discovery of music. The documentation of the different profiles was a good framework to use as a guideline for my project. Aiming for the same level of detail in the description of various film audience profiles, their activities around watching films, their motivations and sources of information were written about at length.

However, to render details for roles such as a curator vs. critic or independent critic vs. commercial critic, I had to pick up the phone and have conversations with those who I felt came closest to each specific role or those belonging to the industry, who would have a better idea than me.

Through several short interviews, better distinctions between profiles were made. I also learned that audiences couldn't be confined to any single role permanently. Some may be more interested in particular genres or styles such as action or suspense, where they might take on the role of an enthusiast or fan. In other instances however, towards documentary films for example, the same people might play the part of a passive audience.

	Spectators	Followers	Enthusiasts
Activity	Spectators mainly watch popular films or those specifically sent their way through social network platforms or emailed links.	They spend a lot of time on Social media. They like to be in the know of new news, including news on film.	Participate in rich discussion around films and take every opportunity to verbalize their opinions and critiques on films.
Background	They have a passing interest in films and hardly any technical knowledge either.	They are familiar with all topics that are trending. Eg: festival highlights or new tools for filming etc. They enjoy films and are exposed to a good variety.	Enthusiasts are passionate about films and are always willing to give films a try, no matter how niche. They maintain a fan status towards certain films/ filmmakers. Enthusiasts quickly learn technical vocabulary through their excessive consumption of films and film blogs.
Pursuit	Spectators are looking to be entertained.	Don't want to miss out on anything that is being discussed. More than films, followers relish the social aspects of films on the web, including the gossip.	Enthusiasts are looking to enrich their own experience of a film by discussing details with others like them. Participation brings forth a sense of belonging.
Source of Information	Commercial advertising and word of mouth from one's social circle are the main sources of discovery. Film recommendations are subject to the interest and knowledge of friends. While spectators may not be loyal to any particular filmmakers or genres, they're also less likely to experiment too much.	Over time, followers have gradually found the right people to follow. These are less likely to be filmmakers, and more likely to be critics/curators who filter information and help followerd to stay up to date with information.	Enthusiasts follow film blogs religiously, and build knowledge or rely on discovery of new content through their close knit communities.
Value they provide to others	When Spectators watch or 'Like' films, they indirectly affect search results and thus the discoverability of films.	Followers share films more actively than spectators do. Through 're-tweets' they carry information from critics/curators to the attention of spectators.	Their passionate discussions on particular films, excite other viewers about those films. Enthusiasts ardently support their favorite filmmakers. They form the core audience base for critics.

| Curator	Synthesizers	Filmmakers
Maintain or write reviews for independent blogs (not commercial publications). Some curators focus on the works of new and engaging filmmakers and scout the Internet for interesting supplemental materials to films they review, such as, filmmaker interviews, film script etc.	Express a media rich, creatively produced commentary on film culture eg. MashUps	Filmmakers upload and aggressively promote their own films on the web.
Curators have an expertise in films that is developed from passion and sometimes training too.	Synthesizers are competent in using post production tools. Popularly synthesizers are filmmakers/editors themselves, who synthesize film information apart from making their own films.	They're incredibly passionate about filmmaking, and continue to do so even thoughit isn't monitarily rewarding.
Curators thrive on being the first to discover and reccommnd new and emerging filmmakers and their work.	These filmmakers are looking to grow their fan base and get noticed. They're also satisfying a personal interest of breaking into cultural dialogue around film.	Want as many people as possible to experience their work.
Critics scout the Internet, dig deep into individual filmmaker websites. Many are approached by filmmakers themselves.	Synthesizers skim through a wide variety of film resources on a daily basis.	Filmmakers alsoregularly scan through a wide variety of film resources and network with others in the profession.
Indie Curators have an authentic voice that is appreciated by their readers. They filter out films worth watching and provide context for niche films, making them digestable for non-experts. Curators support newcomers by helping them get noticed.	Synthesizers bring context to a film through a very unique perspective. Since in video format, their commentaries are enjoyable to watch and could interest non experts too.	Provide new original content.
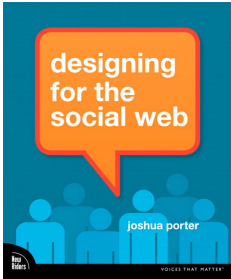
Designing for the social web,

Joshua Porter

Why people participate:

Social capital

Identity

Uniqueness

Reciprocity

Reputation

Sense of efficacy

Control

Ownership

Attachment to a group

Fun

Who's sharing?

The progression of the table maps the increasing level of participation, specifically in terms of effort put forth by audience members in each profile. Coincidentally, this shows an ascending order in an audience's level of interest and expertise in films as well.

The interdependence amongst various film audience types reinforces the fact that unique perspectives are expressed not only by filmmakers any longer, but curators, critics, interpreters, fans and even ordinary spectators. Each of these people supports the activity of the others within the network. The subtle overlaps amongst the roles allude to the fact that none of the viewers show exclusive traits of a single profile either. On account of occasion and film content, viewers typically resembling one of the above profiles can likely shift to an adjacent profile. For example, from impatiently zapping through videos in one instance, viewers attracted by a particular film could voluntarily be sharing in another.

What are they sharing?

Since all these audiences are part of a networked community, it is important to elaborate objects and features that help make the connection between two or more people within the networked community. Towards the left of the table, the object being discussed or shared is the film itself. Towards the right hand side though, the objects become more nuanced. Rather than discussing or bringing to the attention of other people a whole film, participants are discussing fine-grained details, as the underlying theme of a film or technique etc. The nature of the object determines whom people are affiliating with, attracting or trying to address specifically. Sharing of content though, mostly happens downstream, initiated from those at the right with a deeper sense of engagement for film content, and seldom the other way around.

there is a middle-man

After excluding the spectator and the filmmaker at both ends of the spectrum, the population that's left in the middle of the diagram is involved in the circulation of content, acting as a voluntary, free flowing, chain of distributors.

Having been too caught up, focusing on the DIY revolution spurred by the digitization of the indie film industry, I had been looking at this reforming profession through a somewhat constricted lens.

The declining popularity of broadcast media, along with filmmakers taking more control over their film's distribution and marketing, paints a map of the industry in which there are no longer any gate-keepers, no longer any middle-men. In concentrating too close on helping filmmakers better identify, assemble and connect with the right audiences, I had been overlooking the other catalysts in this ecosystem. There are in fact, important middlemen or distributors that I needed to learn about in further detail.

Recruiting Participants

The following description was shared with my personal networks, in order for them to assist me in recruiting research participants that fit the bill.

"I am looking for people who are known to be passionate about films. They take a keen interest in exploring independent films as well as the work of new and emerging filmmakers.
These people are likely to have their own blog, YouTube channel, podcast or someplace to share their discoveries and interpretations on film and video content. They may or may not be formally associated with the film profession."

Five individuals, who came very close to my description, showed much excitement and validation towards my project. In preparation of the semi-structured interviews I would have with these film critics/curators/indie bloggers, I familiarized myself with the nature of their blog posts, tweets and social media presence in general.

Introductions

connectors / promoters / re-distributors / tastemakers

Sam has been a journalist in Mumbai, India for the past 10 years, working very closely with Bollywood. He has a lot of connections in the mainstream film industry and therefore chose to begin an anonymous film blog where he could freely shine light on emerging filmmakers, be himself and share his opinions honestly without feeling the pressure to be politically correct all the time.

Ray is a filmmaker in New York, who writes for a popular film blog in his spare time. While reviewing films is no more than a hobby for him, he really enjoys the benefits of writing for a well-known film blog as he gets regular access to festivals and has a reason to stay updated with new films and filmmakers.

Neil is a filmmaker from Chicago, who doesn't always write conventional reviews, but strongly supports independents like himself or promotes the new wave in cinema brought about by social media through blogs and several other social media outlets.

Pat is a film blogger, whose bio says that he will "defend any film he loves to the death." Apart from his day job, he writes for a collaborative independent blog as an outlet to his love for cinema.

Lou from Surrey, England, is a film and book aficionado who maintains her own website where she posts her reviews on works in both those media.

The names of the participants have been changed.

Contributions

Most of these interviewees shied away from the designation of 'critic', even though they wrote film reviews. These folks were far more comfortable with the title 'curator.' This was to disassociate themselves and their opinions from professional critics who write for established publications. The curators I was interviewing, were simply pointing towards films worth watching, and in this way, functioning as a filters for a small number of audience.

While some of these curators had access to the established film festivals and offered immediate reviews of the work they saw there, others covered local festivals and screenings. All of them though, focused largely on independent films that are hard to come by. Every now and then though, there is a mention of the big blockbusters, but not in the form of dedicated posts, these are usually confined to 140 characters or less.

Apart from just recommending movies, the curators I interviewed were absolutely unanimously sure to include a personal point of view to their blogs. This included details on how a certain film made them feel and they commonly used terms like "I", "me" or "this affected me…" Sometimes it was a unique comparison where a film reminded them of

another. The general observation was that information served through a first person narrative, was what people appreciated, shared and came back to more.

Apart from telling readers what they should watch, curators understand the importance of telling readers why they should be watching something. Even if only in a passing tweet, curators add their two cents about why a film is significant or what one could pay attention to while watching a particular film. In this way, they set an expectation for audiences and reduce their chances of becoming disappointed.

Lastly, reviewers don't just review movies; they hunt down and post promotional and supplemental information on the films they are interested in. Without being asked, they want to support filmmakers and without being asked they want to persuade others to watch the films that are really worth watching.

They're very sensitive to timing and have a natural feel for the promotional material that is good for pre release as compared to post release of a film. Film posters and trailers are commonly shared before the release of a film. But curators are noticing that there's very little post-release material available. Curators try to find interviews or other works of the same filmmaker and if they've interacted with the filmmaker on Twitter, it is not uncommon for them to ask for the film's screenplay to publish on blog.

Internet movies don't really make a big deal about a date of launch, but supplemental materials are moderately successful in giving films an after life. While these aren't irresistible pieces of content, they do offer more than one point of introduction to a filmmaker or their work.

Pursuits

Independent curators write reviews voluntarily, because of their passion for films, and not because they are paid for it or it is their primary occupation. When they spend hours each week hunting down rarities, it is to satisfy their own hunger for films. To feel responsible for helping a filmmaker reach a slightly large audience than they could have on their own or to bring in front of someone a delightful experience that they would have missed otherwise are the moments when curators as film lovers feel "pride and joy" and shouldn't be misunderstood for ego. There are however, a few for whom being the first to discover and share a new film or filmmaker means a lot to their image. For them a day-to-day pursuit for emerging and talented work is a matter of survival. It is a way to constantly remind their audience of their presence.

Curators also strive to be known for their expertise in a particular niche. This may be a specific style of delivering the information, or likeness in the type of films presented to readers. In the same way that viewers know what kind of videos to expect on Vimeo versus the kinds that can be expected from YouTube, they begin to get a better idea of what kind of films certain curators can be expected to talk about.

"I know there are at least 100 people who have watched the film because of me. Not to take credit, or boast, I feel a sense of pride"

"The focus has always been to discover the things that people don't know and that's how it gives an identity, because otherwise there are 100 websites talking about the same Brad Pitt film."

For those curators who are filmmakers first, sharing their personality with audiences results in a longer lasting relationship than any single film could earn them. Additionally, films are not made that often, so when they're not releasing films, curators win over audiences through other channels.

Community & Reciprocity

All but one of the people I interviewed had been part of a joint blog at one point or another. Logistically this made sense because blogging was additional work for writers. Together they could garner a larger audience, boost each others confidence and really enrich their own experience over a common passion. One of the curators mentioned his involvement with a community forum named Passion for Cinema or PFC during days pre Twitter. He reminisced that the blog was kept live 24 hours by contributions pouring in from around the world. In order to revive a similar shared community experience for himself, P1 shared his password and complete editing rights with some of his closest film enthusiast friends so that more people could keep the blog thriving. In addition, P1 runs an open Facebook page too where he allows his viewers to post news about films that they've discovered or want to discuss. Of course, since he and his fellow writers have set a tone for his blog over time, viewers have a good sense of the kind of information they should share on the Facebook counterpart page.

Even if not part of the same blog, curators offer immense mutual support to each other not dissimilar to blogrolls. With Twitter there has been a growing evidence of reciprocity in the support that filmmakers and curators give to each other. There are many examples where

the community has collectively stood up for films that they love and have promoted the filmmaker without being asked to.

All participants confessed to have developed friendships and acquaintances with others like them on the social platforms, thereby exploiting the network effect. This resembled the energy they had experienced at film school, where everyone was always sharing and inspiring each other on a continuous basis.

Audience

The curators projected that their audiences were mainly those with a considerably high interest in films. They seemed certain that other curators and filmmakers represented a large proportion of that readership. These blogs themselves are hard enough to come by and curators are not too concerned about converting passive audiences into film lovers.

The small number of 'lurkers' or passive audiences that do follow curators are in actuality 'peripheral participants' as described by Jenkins in his book Spreadable Media [22]. Even though they seem unresponsive at the moment, they are 'lurking' around to pick up technical vocabulary and knowledge on films. If and when these 'potential participators' are encouraged or guided correctly, they would be able to improve their own exposure to new content and directly or indirectly affect the discovery of films for many around them.

Spreadable Media, Henry Jenkins

This book extrapolates Jenkins' observations on grassroots participation from his previous book 'Convergence Culture' and validates many of my findings about audience participation in content discovery.

In highlighting properties of the shareable artifact, he legitimizes products of 'produsage,' which are inherently incomplete, always evolving, modular, networked and never finished.

Credibility

Stumbling upon a resourceful informant is usually a matter of chance. Yet most in the field would agree that with Twitter, one could stay well updated, especially because of the close relationships that curators develop with filmmakers in the process of promoting their work. But curators carefully handpick the information that they see fit to pass along. It's not just anything and everything they find. Curators collectively responded that they didn't always come across news worth spreading and therefore it was hard to plan posts in advance.

A curator's word is more effective, is more convincing because curators make sure to maintain a high standard of credibility. They pride themselves on offering unbiased reviews. Curators can't afford to taint the influence they have on their readers by falsely praising a friend's film they didn't enjoy. This would defeat the purpose of running an independent blog. To maintain a distant from social ties, some use pseudo handles. In fact, even for films that curators love, they are wary of over-promoting or praising too much at the risk of sounding partial to some of their audiences. Matters do get worse when filmmakers directly approach curators to promote their films though.

Problems with negative feedback

It is more common to read praise of indie films on the Web than criticism. Of course, there's a lot of criticism for mainstream films but the attitude is different for indie films. Independent filmmakers, independent curators get stronger with their networks. In order to protect their social capital, they tread very carefully so as not to harm relationships with anyone. As a result, if a film is bad, it doesn't really receive criticism, it receives the silent treatment.

"Your wall (facbeook) is like your body, you don't want to put a tattoo of something you don't approve of. Promoting a certain movie says something about me too. I care a lot about my image."

Re-intermediation

Filmmaker → Curator → Audience
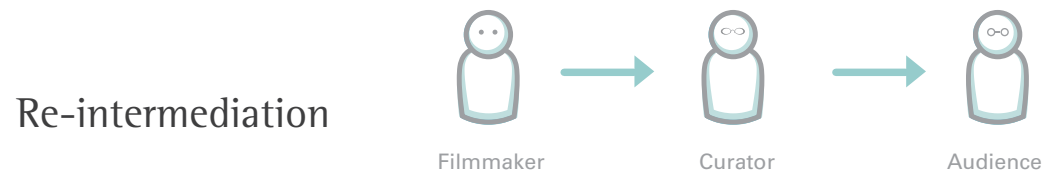
Instead of filmmakers trying to find the right audiences to connect with, it makes better sense that they try and find the right curators instead. Our age of connectivity enables communal rather than individualistic modes of reception. Filmmakers don't have to reach out to each person individually; curators are more effective and willing to do the work for them.

- Curators survive on the discovery of fresh content. Their own work that filmmakers promote on social media is more likely to fall into the hands of curators who are actively on the lookout for new material rather than ordinary viewers.
- Curators specialize in niches and already have an appropriate audience assembled for it.
- Curators have their audiences' best interests at heart. They strive to maintain a trustworthy relationship with audiences. Curators are informative and not just opinionated.
- **Curators are looking for new, creative ways to infuse their personality in their commentary and offer a media rich face to their thoughts.**

a new role, a new culture

A large chunk of Niel's focus as a filmmaker has been on video art and experimental shorts. His films usually screen at singled out events at art gallery or small local film festivals. Last summer, Niel's's work was to be screened at an Art's Festival in Chicago, where ten other filmmakers were also showcasing their films. Niel looked up their information and took the liberty of mashing-up their entries into a promotional video for the event. This worked out in many ways for Niel:

Since all the pieces were thematically connected, Niel's mash-up showed audiences a context. Friends and family of the individual participating filmmakers were able to see that these films belonged to a legitimate sub-genre and weren't just hobbies.

By looking out for the other creators as well, Niel has begun with them, a relationship of cross promotion.

if a picture is worth a thousand words,
what is a video worth?

The role of 'Synthesizer'.

For curatorial purposes, Niel utilizes existing footage to create 'video essays', that are
regularly published on a popular film blog. Video essays he explains are a form of criticism or
commentary contributing to a cultural discourse on film. By adding his own layer of meaning
through manipulation of existing material, Niel is actually packaging other's films to make it
more relevant to his viewers.

Through the form of "Appropriation art", Niel expresses media rich and creatively produced
information to facilitate the discovery of films. As 'synthesizers' do, he brings context to a
film through a very unique perspective. Since in video format, his work is enjoyable to a
larger audience including non-experts too.

Audiences help spread synthesizers' contributions more enthusiastically because they exist in
the viral format of video essays, mash ups and memes.

Chicago Underground Film Festival [23

Tarkovsky: Life as a Reflection [24]

Audiences help spread synthesizers' contributions more enthusiastically because they exist in the engaging and viral format of video essays, mash ups and memes.

Peter Andrews: The Soderbergh Vision [25]

The Oscar video essay made it to 1.5 million views in 7 days and to two TV networks [26]

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Mashup [27]

Creators considered their most successful mash-ups to be the one's with the maximum no. of views. Creators considered their most successful mash-ups to be the one's with the maximum no. of views.

Greenlighting Appropriation

Synthesizers are ardent proponents of artistic re-interpretation of media. As long as no one is desecrating the existing work of others, they see no harm in re-mixing, re-forming or re-editing any publicly available content.

But synthesizers are a very small group of people who feel comfortable appropriating and feel flattered when others have appropriated their original work.

Conversely, the majority dismisses appropriated pieces as shoddy, casual and aimless. Folks in popular media take the prohibitionist stand against appropriated content and try everything in their capacity to shut it down.

"I'm like a kid in a candy store."

Access to a profusion of raw material, is a liberating experience for the creator.

"I made my Oscar video in the two hours I had before gym."

It offers the freedom to tell a story spontaneously.

"It's cool to use advertising footage from trailers and things that are being forced into our eyes. I can't see why we can't have fun with it if we are forced to watch it."

Scott Pilgrim Vs. Inception [28]

The Bieber Speech [29]

Traces Mood Trailer [30]

Although the filmmaker claims that the following mashups are just examples of him having fun with footage, when asked whether this was a way to expose his audience to his humor and personality, he promptly agrees.

Although the filmmaker claims that the following mashups are just examples of him having fun with footage, when asked whether this was a way to expose his audience to his humor and personality, he promptly agrees. It is true that a majority of the material that is appropriated today is commercial, popular content. The main reason for this is that this material is widely recognized, improving its virality. However, in the next example we see how appropriated footage has been used as a mood board of sorts in a compilation called a "mock trailer" or "mood trailer" for an upcoming project.

A list of Apps that allow aggregation of variety of media

There's an App for that

Understandably, the two curators who were adept with mashing up work, were also the two who were filmmakers. They had a keen eye for storytelling and a competency with editing software. Experience with re-contextualizing images was a big part of the foundation they had undergone at film school. Although back then, footage was re-cut and spliced together out of necessity rather than choice.

Those who don't have the necessary training to create mash-ups, now have apps. Via the South by Southwest Film conference this year, I found a whole range of mobile and web applications that make it really easy for anyone to pull in different types of data from a variety of social media sources to create interactive/video pieces.

These aren't designed specifically for the purpose of film discovery or film creation and it's current use is confined to people documenting their own lives for their friends and family. I'm mentioning these tools because they too show us a clear path towards more media appropriation in the future, even though at the moment, appropriation is regarded as cheating or plagiarism by many.

architecture of the opportunity space

Spectator	Follower	Enthusiast	Curator	Synthesizer	Filmmaker
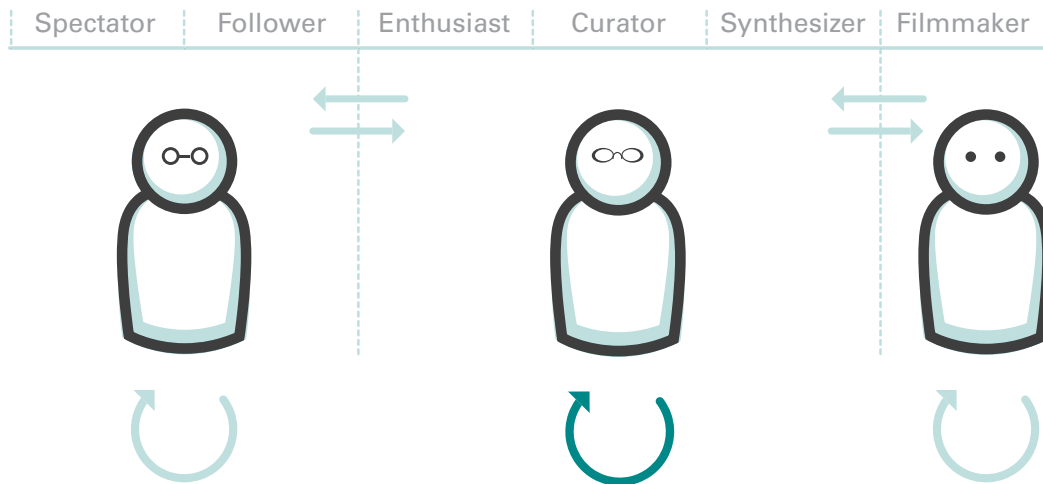
The arrows represent opportunities for design intervention:

Improved communication in either of the intersections between the filmmaker and curator or the curator and the audience.

Better support for the individual practices of the filmmaker, curator/synthesizer or audience.

Features to facilitate participation and exploit the network effect.

"There is no delight in owning anything unshared."

From the anecdotes shared by the synthesizers, the most apparent obstacle in their path

seemed to be the negative regard everyone else had towards appropriation. Hollywood

suppresses it under the pretext of copyright infringement and audiences dismiss it as casual

work. Many independent filmmakers, who are still reluctant to embrace the web itself, look

down on mash-ups as being unsophisticated.

Apart from a very small number of synthesizers, everyone else thinks appropriation is

unethical. Of course, the folks at Creative Commons have established a system for to make

such practices fair, but since the act of crediting is left completely to the appropriator's

discretion, it is an ineffective clause.

encouraging a culture of crediting

But why?

Better implementation of a crediting system is directly proportional to the encouragement and acceptance of 'appropriation art'.

And why is that important?

A glimmer of tearable, transferable and re-purposed video content on the Web today, as seen from the examples in this document is pointing to the arrival of a future indie cinema, which is integral to the social nature of the Internet. Film production too, through collaboration, co-creation and re-mixing is migrating to the Internet, where the exhibition, and distribution phases of filmmaking have already paved the way.

mixa

Mixa is a proposed system that honors content creators by making attribution consistent and codified. In our present day information economy, where ideas spark new ideas, paying our dues to those who have enriched and inspired us is going to help our work evolve more ethically and gracefully.
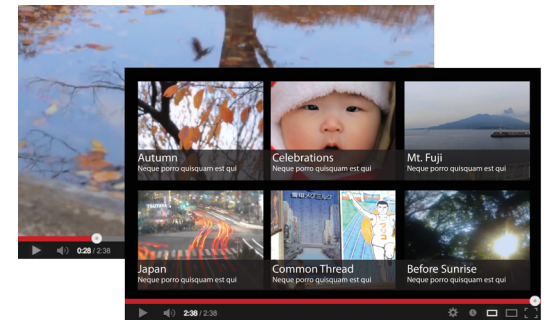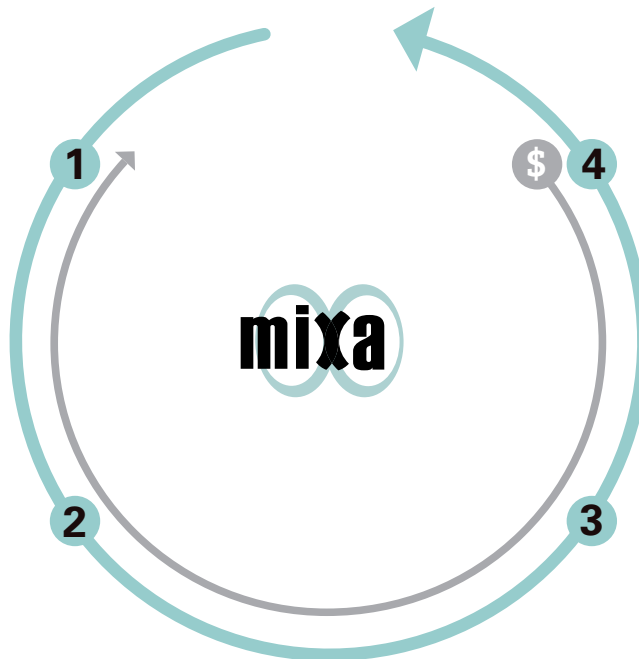
Mixa System Overview

Watch

Download

Upload with 'active credits'

Appropriate

mixa

1
2
3
4

01. Watch

The system requires the inclusion of the Mixa button on existing video players such as YouTube or Vimeo. This warrants that potential audiences don't have to go anywhere new to encounter the system.

The ubiquitous presence of the button, first and foremost, signifies to audiences that it is acceptable to appropriate content creatively, an action that most people are afraid of doing.

02. Download

By clicking on the Mixa button, the media content can be acquired. It includes a digital watermark containing meta-data about the creator.

03. Appropriate

The media piece thus obtained can now be remixed as the appropriator sees fit. There is no restriction on the choice of software for remixing these files, as they will continue to carry the meta-data of the original creator no matter how they are chopped up, manipulated and re-used.
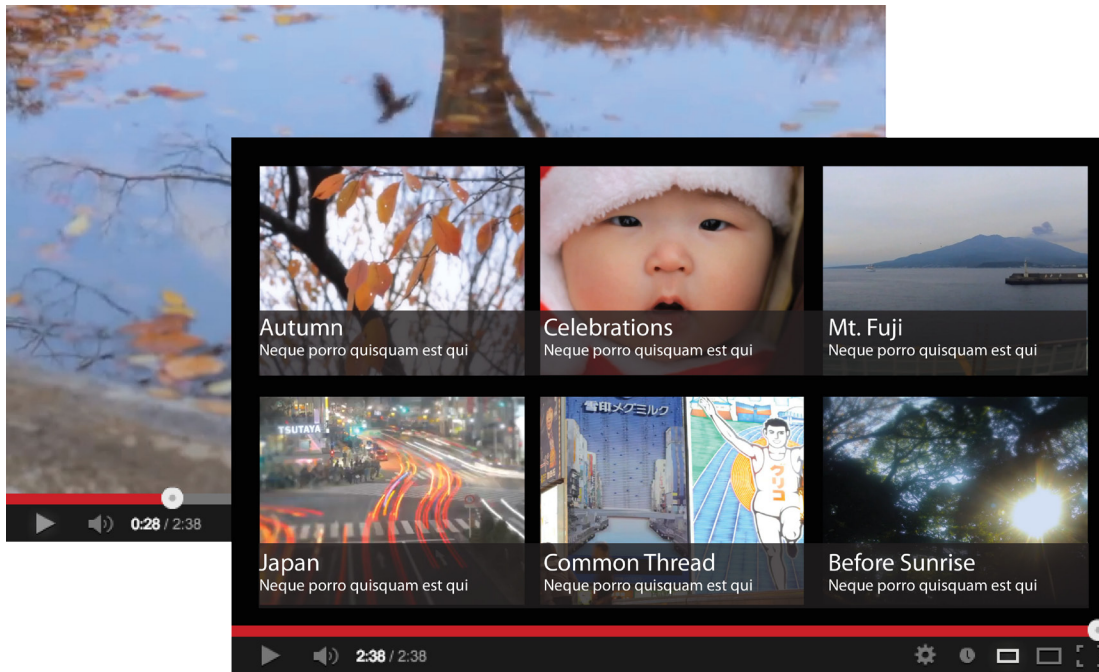
04. Upload + 'active credits'

At the end of watching a video with contents appropriated from other work, the viewer is offered recommendations of other films and videos, per usual. Along side these suggestions that are primarily prompted by interest graphs, he or she can see 'active credits' as well. These are links to pieces that were used in the appropriated film that was just watched, allowing viewers to trace back and discover the roots of the film.

There was little benefit in designing a tool for appropriation. This is because an existing range of tools and applications, targeted not at one but all types of audiences are already gaining popularity with a promise of exponential growth in the future.
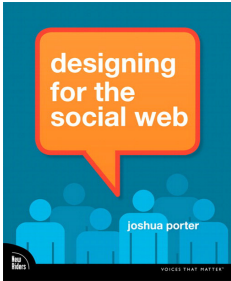
Designing for the Social Web,

Joshua Porter

The Endowment Effect is the tendency of people to value things more once a sense of ownership has been established.

The system should generate an **analytic's platform** for creators or filmmakers that shows details of how viewers have embraced their content.

# New measures of audience engagement

Young filmmakers on the web have already given up on any expectations of earning decent revenues from their films. What they now define as success is a handsome number of views instead.

There are currently no other means of measuring audience appreciation. Filmmakers would absolutely love to see the different ways in which audiences are engaging with their films, particularly if others found their work worthy of inclusion in their own pieces.

Appropriation as a kind of audience expression signifies a deeper level of investment towards a filmmaker, an energy that can't be bought through advertising, indicating a higher likelihood of the audience returning in the future. If people have to work for something, they devote more time to it. And they give it more emotional value. The Endowment Effect is the tendency of people to value things more once a sense of ownership has been established.

New streams of revenue

Since the mixa system maintains data ties with all original creators, appropriated content could be approved for commercial exhibition as well. The system could easily implement re-distribution of the revenue generated, proportionally amongst all filmmakers whose work features in the earning film.

Watch **1**

4 Upload

Download **2**
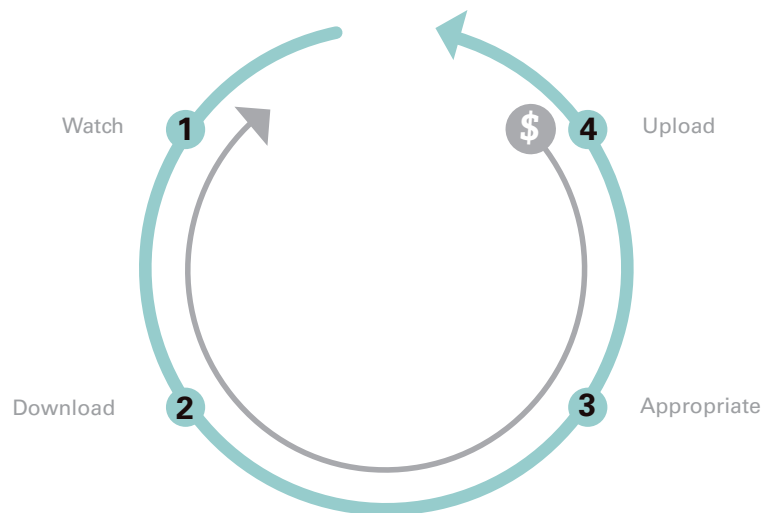
3 Appropriate

the bigger picture

Discoverability: A bread crumb trail

The 'active credits' provide an additional outlet for filmmakers to appear in front of appropriate audiences. Despite the mechanisms of collaborative filtering working meticulously in the backdrop, people still complain about the predictability of Netflix recommendations.

While evaluating this concept, an audience advocated that 'active credits' was like getting recommendations from the filmmakers themselves. The audience could now have access to films with a similar mood and aesthetic style, nuances that aren't usually entered into search fields.

Welcoming newcomers: Creativity is combinatorial in a pro-am era

Appropriation has lower barriers to entry than creating something from scratch. With systematic attribution bringing down the barriers further, more audiences can be encouraged to participate. This first hand engagement enriches the audience's experience of a film and amplifies their ties with the filmmakers who's material they have played around with.

'Although we've been raised in a culture surrounded by images, most of us are not fluent makers of images. We are better equipped as writers of words because of the literate nature of our education.' As is commonly noticeable in the works of fan fiction, amateurs achieve wonders when they have some existing cultural references to tap into. With this system, amateurs have a rich vocabulary needed to express themselves in sophisticated ways.

This system creates a context where grassroots creativity is respected rather than shut down. The skills and confidence that are often acquired through experimentation and play bear important implications for how people participate in issues of larger cultural or even political outlooks.

Those budding filmmakers who really want to try their hands at the profession, despite its low returns on investment, could now have access to really high quality footage to work with, even on meager budgets.

"And we're doing it for the love of it" (the word amateur derives from the Latin amator, 'lover' from amare, 'to love')"

"Everyone will survive if
  everyone works together."

Impact

Will unbridled appropriation be exacerbating the problem area I had begun with? Will there be a lot more clutter and noise produced, for audiences to sift through?

With the deep penetration of video enabled smart phones and growing Internet bandwidth, the 72 hours of video that are uploaded to YouTube every minute are very likely to grow exponentially anyway. With the system in place, content creators will be able to trace and get rewarded for the derivations of their work through the diverging chaos.

Over a period of time, the system could reveal useful insights on the path of the "information scent", impacting the work of democratic artists even more effectively.

Critique

In contemplating all the details of this system, I felt unsure about the automated nature of crediting. Since my aim was to instill a culture of crediting, it seemed more desirable if crediting were a voluntarily act rather than a forced one.

Creative Commons relies on individuals to passively credit 'to the best of their ability' [31]. This results in inadequate or inaccurate credits or those that are hidden somewhere in the comment section that follows a video. Attributing a CC Licensed work requires thorough mention of many details. Would this afford whimsical and sporadic creations?

Another project titled curatorscode.org offers two beautifully designed Unicode characters: 'Via' and 'Hat tip'. Respectively, these represent direct discovery or reposting content with little or no modification, and indirect discovery, where content is a jumping-off point to inspire the creation of new content [32]. The issue here is that the intervention is not widely known and the meaning along with the subsequent use of these symbols are not consistent.

Significance of a remixed culture

History of convergence culture

19th century: no pure boundary between emergent commercial culture and residual folk culture. Both raided each other.

20th century: Mass Audience. The commercial entertainment industry set standards of technical perfection and professional accomplishment few grassroots performers could match.

21st century: public reemergence of grassroots creativity as everyday people take advantage of new technologies that enable them to archive, annotate, appropriate and recirculate media content.[33]

'A medium has to establish itself as satisfying some core human demand.'[34]
In this case, it is the human need to make. Human engagement soars when we experience our world by getting our hands dirty rather than watching from a few steps back. 'There's nothing inherent in humans that makes them want to be passive consumers of entertainment.'

On a cultural scale, our day-to-day practices are constantly adapting to technology. An example of this is marked in the growing acceptance of constructionist education spurred by Maker culture and the open source movement. In focusing on the joy of making, our technology is helping us set the backdrop for an environment where good and bad ideas have a space to form and grow before or without evolving for commerce.

The art of Storytelling is central to our cultural activities as human beings. 'We use stories to make sense of our world and to share that understanding with others.'

On a historical note, every new medium has given rise to a new form of narrative. It is time to explore and experiment with the Internet and its affordance for non-linear, participatory and remixed storytelling. As the meaning of entertainment has changed for us, so should the form. It's important for any society to value, encourage and archive the evolution of creativity because it has the power to challenges norms and refresh our perspectives.

"Okay, you have your guitar, but you don't have to do it right. You can do it wrong! It doesn't matter one bit if you're a skilled musician; it just matters if you have something to say."

[35]

conclusion

After having dipped my toes into all three phases of the filmmaking process, namely production, distribution and exhibition, a robust foundational understanding of the industry and all the factors influencing it was acquired.

The first key observation was triggered by prominent themes in the literature review, pertaining to the changing behaviors of audiences. A resonance and evolution of active participation from audiences was observed in a number of examples on the Internet.

From questioning the audiences in detail about their activities and pursuits, it was clear that audiences served a crucial function in the field of digital distribution. On further scrutiny, a new shift in the audience's role as re-distributor was observed. While preforming the tasks of distribution, particularly the 'synthesizers' in the audience, partake in production as well.

Through a non-linear route, an emerging group of people, the 'synthesizers' were discovered. These people bring films to the notice of others, but do it in creative ways, using rich media that's fitting for the Internet.

The proposed system of crediting --- invites and encourages people to join in this burgeoning culture, that is currently being shaped by the synthesizers. With the crediting system taking care of the underlying formalities of appropriation, creators have the freedom to shape one of the possible future directions for independent cinema.

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