Capturing the Commons: (Ways Forward for) The CC Case Studies Initiative
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Rationale

Significant work has been undertaken by the Creative Commons community to document the quantitative measures of license adoption. Research led by Giorgios Cheliotis at Singapore Management University (Cheliotis, Chik, Guglani & Kumar Tayi, 2007) has tracked an increasing social shift towards open collaboration both in developed and developing nations. Australia's *Unlocking IP* project has superimposed a map on this landscape, following browsers' back-links to licenses to put a number on international participants in the scheme (Bildstein, 2008). Estimates of the uptake of licenses now number in the hundreds of thousands (http://wiki.creativecommons.org/Metrics), with key sites such as Flickr now marking more than 100 million photographs licensed under CC (http://creativecommons.org/weblog/entry/13588).

Five years after the commencement of Creative Commons, it became imperative to complement this research by a qualitative understanding of users' motivations to engage with 'CC'. The 'new global consciousness of sharing and participation across national borders' (Cheliotis et al., p. 1) prompts us to examine which open content license has been chosen by users and why. Capturing the narrative of 'openness' illustrates the ongoing success of the initiative, and further outlines ways in which it can be enhanced to achieve its objectives.

This research is premised on the idea that:

> *'What artists need to see before they can feel confident about the licenses are examples of other[s] taking the licenses; incorporating them into their practices.' (OpenBusiness.cc, 2006, p. 8)*

Documenting the operation of the sharing economy by highlighting successful business models in specific domains shows how communities collaborate to exchange ideas and enhance innovations. The purpose of this essay is to showcase the CC Case Studies wiki initiative and to suggest future developments and applications (http://wiki.creativecommons.org/Case_Studies).

Building an Australasian Commons

The Creative Commons case studies project was initiated as an attempt to assess the impact of the CC initiative in Australasia. A book, *Building an Australasian Commons: Case Studies vol 1.* (Cobcroft, 2008), was commissioned by the Creative Commons Clinic at the Queensland University of Technology to document the cross-sector participation in the sharing economy, highlighting the uptake of CC licenses in education and research, government and cultural institutions, the visual arts, music, film, writing, and for democratic change. Results were intended to underpin further development of the ported licenses and heuristic aids, responding to *Unlocking the Potential Through Creative Commons* (Bledsoe, Coates & Fitzgerald, 2007) action items for community engagement.

Sixty-five entries describing both individual and institutional engagement were included in the edition, and went on to be published as individual booklets based on topic

(http://creativecommons.org.au/casestudiesvol1). These local exemplars provided a regional basis for the international case studies wiki project.

CC Case Studies Wiki

Perceiving the need to extend the case studies project to an international audience, Creative Commons endorsed the development of the international case studies wiki: http://wiki.creativecommons.org/Case_Studies. A road map became the foundation of efforts, with a development team assembling in China, Washington, and Brisbane. Emphasis was placed on usability, through a simple user-centric design of the input template, and international extensions through translation. Functionality included the ability to sort and search by media, whether image, audio, geodata, text, or video. Inclusion of a feature image, a one-line synopsis, and article summary focused attention on the key points of the study.

International Launch: Case Studies Campaign

A campaign was launched by CC to improve the submission process online and generate further outside interest (http://creativecommons.org/weblog/entry/14392). Project Leads of CC jurisdictions were encouraged to submit stories from their country and in their language (as with Colombia, Chile, and Germany). Since the relaunch, nearly a hundred additional studies have been submitted. The wiki is being added to daily, with hopes of future improvement in quality and quantity. It is the authors' hope that the Free Culture workshop will reveal the best way forward for the initiative.

Methodological Insights

The case study methodology is invaluable in addressing the usefulness and usability of CC licenses, providing a rich context to complement the statistical trends shown to date. By chronicling participation and capturing users' narratives surrounding CC, it presents an appropriate method for mapping values and ideals motivating users' engagement. Via in-depth expression of licensing experiences, the case study approach allows the organization to enhance the brand of the initiative. Moreover, this qualitative approach can be complemented by statistics garnered from the site.

With the wiki, participants have been invited to provide detail as to:

- Organizational goals, founding principles, business models, partner organizations
- Current projects
- How users first heard about open content licenses/Creative Commons
- Motivations to adopt CC
- Specific license selection
- Benefits and problems with adoption
- Tools to assist explanation

Participants use a standardized form to submit their responses, and can review and edit the text directly via the wiki's functionality. Supplementary data has been curated from personal

interviews, online articles, policy recommendations, testimonials, published business figures, and the like.

Exemplary Documentation: Music

The case studies currently cover license usage in an array of fields, from education and research, government and cultural institutions, the visual arts, music, film, writing, and social engagement. For the purpose of this article, 'music' has been selected to demonstrate the depth of information provided in this resource.

Type of license user

Submissions in the field of music range from hobbyists to unsigned and signed artists, well-known and commercially successful musicians, record/netaudio labels, distribution platforms, and community portals. The scope of submissions is a tribute to the diversity of CC stakeholders and the breadth of the case studies.

Motivations

A sampling of motivations expressed to date include reciprocity, experimentation, publicity, frustration with existing models, cost reduction, control over rights, and the desire to receive wider distribution.

License Usage

The licensing terms of choice vary greatly, from the public domain, to the most permissive and most restrictive licenses. The usage of alternative licenses, such as the GNU Free Documentation License, the Free Art License, and the retired CC SamplingPlus and CC NonCommerical SamplingPlus, is also addressed.

Business Models

While descriptive accounts of business models exist for many studies, additional quantitative data would enhance the resource and enable further analysis. As outlined below, a key challenge in the current iteration of the case studies is providing figures to better assess the financial and social success of various licensing practices. In the field of music, such information could include: sales numbers for albums or tracks, numbers of downloads, number of remixes, number of trackbacks. An example of such data is at http://ccmixter.org/view/media/extras/stats.

Other content domains (education, film, image, etc.) mirror the information captured in the field of music, often with analogous strengths and weaknesses. The section below seeks to propose how possible gaps could be filled and how future research could develop.

Three Key Challenges

The following areas present primary challenges central to the understanding of how the CC community functions and evolves.

1. Ongoing Analysis

With data derived from the wiki, it is possible to model user incentives and motivations, define business models and gauge the economic impact of license adoption. Insights into sharing behavior could emerge, for example, by plotting trajectories of license usage and tracking relevant changes.

Furthermore, existing statistical research (Cheliotis, et. al., 2007) and licensor surveys (Kim, M., 2007) could support an analytical narrative about changes in the user base of Creative Commons licenses across time and geography, as well as in respect to occupation and motivation.

2. Improve existing submissions

Supporting data on topics such as creators' financial and social success would quantitatively augment the case studies and contribute to further analysis. Complementary research, such as the current work on cooperative models in the sale and distribution of media (Belsky, L., Kahr, B., & Benkler, Y., 2008), could be integrated into investigations of which 'Free Culture' approaches are in practice and how they fare.

3. Enhance functionality

The current wiki tools are available freely to all, but improvements in their functionality may boost submissions and the scope of documentation. Wiki enhancements could build upon user-experience feedback as well as incorporate lessons learned from similar projects. Continued curation of incoming submissions would ensure the studies remain useful and accurate.

Conclusion

The Creative Commons Case Studies are a notable and growing resource documenting innovative license usage and motivations for sharing. The case studies work to inform the public about open licensing in a clear and accessible way, while also offering a qualitative component to quantitative research projects such as CC Monitor. The wiki and related publications aim to provide structured, descriptive accounts of sharing in a range of fields from creators around the world. It is the authors' hope that the Free Culture research community finds this resource of value and that the project can be developed in collaboration with and to the benefit of all.

References

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Additional Abstract

The Creative Commons Case Studies wiki provides a collaborative tool to capture qualitative data on the establishment and evolution of the Free Culture community. As such, it underpins many of the fields this research workshop seeks to address, from 'studies on the use and growth of open/free licensing models' to 'critical analyses of the role of Creative Commons or similar models in promoting a Free Culture.' By gathering input from the wide variety of users of open content licenses, the CC wiki project speaks of the successes of open licensing, and its remaining challenges. It explores users' incentives to license freely, and the boundary between the sharing and commercial economies in business models employed by community entrepreneurs. It is the authors' hope that the discussion surrounding the Case Studies initiative will instigate further development of this resource, and enhance the critical connection between qualitative and quantitative investigation.

Biographies

Michelle Thorne

Michelle Thorne is the Project Manager for Creative Commons International, coordinating over fifty jurisdictions worldwide to localize and promote the Creative Commons licensing suite. She holds a B.A. in Critical Social Thought and German Studies from Mount Holyoke College, where she completed an honors thesis on authorship, originality, and American copyright law. She co-organizes several Free Culture events in Berlin, including the salon series Openeverything Fokus and the design barcamp Atoms & Bits.

Rachel Cobcroft

Rachel Cobcroft is the Australian project lead for the Creative Commons Case Studies initiative, publishing *Building an Australasian Commons: Case Studies* in 2008. Her current research explores users' motivations to share content under CC licenses and online community structures. She is a graduate of the Oxford Internet Institute Summer Doctoral Programme held at the Berkman Center, Harvard Law School, and is at present a Senior Research Analyst at Queensland State Archives investigating the use of digital media in government.