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# 사용자 제작 콘텐츠의 활성화를 위한 연구 : 구비문학의 이론을 중심으로

## UCC as Online Folklore : What Makes Users Generate More and Better Content?

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요약 최근 인터넷 공간에서 사용자가 직접 만들어 내는 콘텐츠, 즉 UCC (user created contents, 이하 UCC)에 대한 관심이 그 어느 때보다 증가하고 있다. UCC란 기존의 온라인 콘텐츠 제공업자와 달리 일반 사용자에게 의해 만들어져 게시판과 같은 도구를 사용하여 온라인 상에 게재되는 콘텐츠를 말한다. 사용자가 직접 콘텐츠를 제작하여 인터넷 공간에 게재하는 행위는 인터넷의 시작부터 존재하였다. 그런데 UCC가 최근 들어 더욱 관심을 받고 있는 이유에는 사용자가 직접 콘텐츠를 만들고 게재하는 것이 용이하도록 변화된 환경의 조성 및 콘텐츠 제작을 쉽게 할 수 있는 저작도구가 지속적으로 만들어지고 확산되었기 때문이다. 결과적으로 사용자 측면에서는 다른 사람들과 소통하는 통로가 확대되었고, 사업자 측면에서는 보다 콘텐츠를 풍부하게 확보할 수 있는 환경이 열린 것이다. 본 연구는 구비문학의 이론을 통하여 UCC의 활성화에 영향을 미치는 요소를 탐색적으로 살펴보는 것을 목적으로 한다. 구비문학은 텍스트를 향유하는 사람들 사이에서 공유되는 이야기로서 그 생산 환경의 매커니즘과 텍스트의 발전 양상이 UCC와 매우 유사하다. 따라서 본 연구에서는 자료의 분석과 이론적 모형의 수립 과정 전반에 있어 구비문학의 이론과 접근 방법을 사용하였다. UCC가 매우 활발하게 생산되는 주제를 선정하여, 그 주제에 해당하는 커뮤니티의 특성, 사용자들 간의 관계, 사용자 정책 등 차이가 있는 세 온라인 커뮤니티를 선정하였다. 선정된 온라인 커뮤니티의 게시판의 포스트와 댓글을 프로그램을 통하여 수집하고 분석하였으며, 그 분석된 데이터를 바탕으로 사용자를 선정하여 심층 인터뷰를 진행하였다. 심층 인터뷰 데이터는 근거이론을 이용하여 분석하였다. 본 연구의 결과는 UCC 확산이라는 새로운 인터넷 패러다임 속에서 이를 구비문학의 이론으로 분석했다는 점에서 학문적 의의가 있다. 또한 성격이 다른 세 개의 사이트에서의 UCC를 비교함으로써 UCC를 기반으로 한 사이트 설계의 가이드 라인이 될 수 있는 실용적 의의를 가진다.

*핵심어: 사용자 제작 콘텐츠, 온라인 커뮤니티, 구비문학, 사용자 참여*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, user-generated content (UCC), a burgeoning social phenomenon, has been watched with keen interest. UCC can be defined as new online media content produced by common users, as opposed to traditional media producers such as broadcasters and production companies [1]. For instance, writings or videos on blogs, user reviews of online shopping malls, or parodied or retouched pictures on bulletin boards, are typical UCC. As multimedia contents are growing, UCC becomes more popular. YouTube, a leading online video site, announced that more than one hundred million videos had been posted, and more than 2.5 billion videos were watched per day. YouTube was

also named as Time Magazine's „best invention 2006 [2].

Also, services like Ask Yahoo, Flickr, or digg are based on content generated by users. Users now no longer just passively receive content from companies; they have started to participate actively in content generation. UCC is shifting the paradigm of the Internet from the one-way propagation of contents by companies to users towards an each-way sharing and building of content amongst users.

In fact, UCC has existed from the beginning of the Internet; it is, however, getting more attention recently because of social and technological factors. At the same time, UCC has opened up vast opportunities for Internet companies to secure abundant content.

Previous studies had addressed issues concerning getting users to participate in the community and sharing or generating ideas, information, or their experiences. Some researchers approached the topic from psychological perspectives, such as increasing motivation to participate in online communities [3]. Others designed systems which help users to grasp current important issues or to make known their contribution [4-7].

However, previous online communities and UCC communities are different in some aspects. First, UCC is usually made by the participation of ordinary users. Second, unlike previous online communities, most UCC sites are strongly influenced by the UCC community service providers: their policies and user interface. Therefore, it is need to investigate the effects of vision, business model, and policies of UCC service providers.

This paper investigates two research questions for the better understanding of UCC. The first goal of this study is to investigate the content generation activities of ordinary users in practice. Second goal is to identify critical factors for UCC vitalization concentrated on the policies of service providers.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

To identify critical factors for UCC, we used concepts and theories in folklore. Folklore is defined as “tradition-based communicative units informally exchanged in dynamic variation through space and time” [8]. Folklore includes tools, customs, and orally-circulated tales, which are consistently shared and dynamically changed through the interaction of people in community [9]. Therefore, based on a concrete theoretical background, we can adopt important factors for stimulating UCC from prior studies in folklore.

### 2.1 Commonalities between UCC and Folklore

UCC can be regarded as online folklore for two reasons:

environment and process. First, UCC and folklore have similar *environments*. Three environmental elements of folklore are tradition, community, and performer [10]. *Tradition* includes norms or customs of community, and also includes folk tales, songs or dances which are repeatedly transmitted. *Community* means a group which is formed based on obligations to each other, or for certain goals [11]. In the folkloristic approach, all works, such as tales, songs, or dances, are transmitted, changed, or generated as belonging to a community. One of the most important elements in folklore is the skill of the *performer*. Folk tales can come to life when a performer (narrator) tells them to audiences [12]. Unlike printed tales, the audience of folk tales can interact with the narrator. Therefore, the abilities of the performer, such as what repertory they have and how much they interact with the audience, determine the quality of the tales.

Like folklore, there are *traditions* in UCC, such as transmitted themes, and content generation styles or norms. Content generation activities take place in a certain *community* which has been voluntarily formed by interested users. If a user uploads content, he/she can be regarded as a *performer* of UCC.

Secondly, both UCC and folklore have communicative and accumulative characteristics in their *processes*. Folklore is not created by a one-way process but emerges through co-operation between performer and audience. The performer can change the plot of a tale to suit the interest of the audience. Also, the responses of an audience influence tales. Their participation makes tales more interesting and rich. Therefore, performing folk works (performance in folklore terms) takes place with the interaction of people, and it can be said that folklore is a *communicative* process [13]. And, if a text is accepted as meaningful in a community, members in that community re-write and amend the text to better express the interest of the community [14]. Folk tales and songs have various

meanings, and form in various versions, as they evolve. Therefore, it can be said that folklore has an *accumulative* process.

In the UCC process, the *communicative* characteristic can be observed when a user uploads content and other users respond to a post by expressing their thoughts or opinions. Original content generators edit their content by observing responses from the audience. Also, the UCC process can be considered *accumulative* because certain themes were created and then evolve as people add and modify existing contents, as well as recreating a variant theme from existing contents.

## 2.2 Critical Factors for Folklore

Based on folklore theories, we established four critical frameworks for UCC. **Context of culture** includes policy of UCC service provider, shared interests of community and tradition. The role of service provider is critical because their policies and business models determine the system interface and even user behavior. Also, providers policies and business models determine their policies towards users. **Context of situation** in UCC environment includes system and interface of UCC community and the relationship between content generator and audience. For instance, how users create contents which are high quality and how well they reflect the interests of the community. **Skill of generator** includes specialized skill of users and how they reflect the needs of other users. A good content is the content which has meanings to users who share and enjoy it. **Response of audience** is one of the most important factors for vitalization of content generation activities. User response to contents by replying their opinions or recommend those contents. Unlike folklore, even the generator leave the UCC community, users in site are sharing their thought or judging the quality of contents. These four attributes gave a framework for analyzing data and finding critical factors for UCC vitalization.

## 3. DATA COLLECTION

### 3.1 Site selection

In order to identify critical factors for content generation, three UCC communities were chosen, based on three selection criteria. Firstly, we selected communities which operated successfully and actively, with continuous content generation and user participation. Secondly, to remove contamination effects due to differences in theme or user interests, we selected communities with the same theme. Thirdly, we selected communities with different interfaces and atmospheres, in order to identify the context of service providers. Following these criteria, we selected three communities about the TV drama "Goong". Users in the community were known to actively generate contents, such as by composing music videos, editing pictures, or writing reviews of the drama.

We selected three major communities: a specialized community portal (SCP), a general internet portal (GIP), and a contents service site (CSS). The selected SCP is one of the best-known Korean internet community sites. The selected CSS is a community for the broadcasting company.

### 3.2 Data sources

For the analysis of content generation behavior and user interaction, we constructed an archive of each community's data. We constructed a program with *perl* for bulletin board analysis. This program converts information in the database into a form that suits our research questions. We collected archival data for four months, starting from early January, 2006, when the drama started, to 31th March, 2006, when it had been finished for a month.

We conducted interviews with eight users, three of them by instant messenger because of privacy issues. Two of them were in SCP, three of them were in GIP, two of them were in CSS, and one user participated both in SCP and GIP. The average age was 27.9 years, and one male and seven females participated. For the purpose of establishing policy

for each community service company, we interviewed administrators at each company.

### 3.3 Data analysis

Data was analyzed in two ways. Firstly, we quantitatively analyzed archival data from the bulletin boards to form an overview of each community. We calculated data such as the number of participants, trends in content upload frequency, and average number of replies to posts. In order to interpret the results in relation to critical factors for UCC, we identified users in an A-list [15]. In order to be a member of the A-list, users had to be ranked top 10 in terms of the number of upload posts and the number of average replies to their posts. Five users in each community were selected for the A-list. We also selected a theme to observe how shared interests in the community influenced content generation and derivation. Interview data with heavy users and community service providers was analyzed qualitatively by using grounded theory method [16-18].

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.2. Context of Culture

#### 4.2.1. UCC Policy of service provider

Each three UCC communities had different policies for UCC. The policy of SCP is minimum intervention in user behavior. They delete illegal or abusive posts at a minimal level and entrusts community management to users. Also, SCP opens each bulletin board by collecting the user opinions and requests. Administrators in SCP did not consider any profit sharing system with active content generators. The SCP administrator said:

*"Our primary goal is to ensure that users don't feel any difficulties when they write or connect to the system. We also once considered a profit system based on UCC, but that's not what our users want."* [SCP Team leader of service, female]

GIP had similar policy with SCP. However, GIP considered

monetary reward system which shared profit with content generators. CSS has high quality official broadcast contents. They also know the importance of UCC, but they were confident that high quality official content is more competitive than UCC.

#### 4.2.2. Copyright issues

The three companies in this study are in different positions and had different perspectives on copyright. SCP did not consider copyright as a serious issue. They recognized copyright can be critical for UCC; however, they think copyright is not a big issue if users generate content just for sharing and having fun and enjoyment with others, not for commercial profit. GIP was severely pressured by CSS to delete content which violated copyright, especially videos. CSS was sensitive about the illegal sharing of videos of their programs. The administrator of GIP said:

*"Copyright is an important issue, and we instruct our users to observe the rule properly. We delete illegal contents in a fair and transparent way, and give notice to users by email."* [GIP Team leader of media team, female]

Users also had opinions about copyright. Participants worry about generating content by using television programs. However, like the administrator at SCP, they thought the copyright issue would not be a big problem if they generate only for sharing within the community. A participant in SCP said:

*"Actually, we are careful in generating content. But, it's funny; we gather together, share good pictures and writings. We worry about violating copyright a little but not that much."* [SCP2, female, 36 years old, housewife]

Interestingly, for about the right of UCC, in SCP and GIP, users think the contents belong to community, not to them. So, they make community symbol and insert it to their pictures or videos. Users approve the re-use of their contents by other users within community. However, they complain the copy of their contents to other community without any notice to them.

*"I think my writings belong to my community. If I thought it was mine, I might upload them by my name. Real name. I'm a member of this community. So, I think my contents are my community's."*

*[SCP1, female, 24 years old, university student]*

#### 4.2.3. Reward system

Each UCC service providers had different reward system. Recognition or reputation plays as a reward to content generators. Monetary reward is also considered and users have positive opinion about monetary reward from service providers. For the long-term planning, administrators in GIP and CSS are designing profit sharing reward structure with active and skillful content generators. Users answered positive opinions about profit sharing model of UCC service providers:

*"I have nothing to complain of giving money or supporting from service companies. They gain recognition, and earn money. That is reasonable and fair."* *[SCP1, female, 24 years old, university student]*

However, users pointed fair and well designed selection system.

*"People usually think, well. I have equal ability to them. Monetary reward may have similar problem. Selection process should be fair."* *[SCP2, female, 36 years old, housewife]*

#### 4.2.4. User relationship

In the UCC community, increased closeness of relationship positively influences content generation. Enhanced relationship enabled cooperative content generation. The total number and percentage of replies about user relationship of selected A-list user and theme and the number of posts about offline meetings were analyzed. One third of A-list users replies in SCP (31.1%, 3176) and GIP (35.8%, 1513) were about making relationship. Analysis of replies by theme shows that 20.2% (1589) of replies in SCP were about user relationship which is the highest and GIP (17.9%, 563) and CSS (12.6%, 199) were similar.

One of the results of enhanced user relationship is collaborative content generation. From the results of the interview data, we found that close relationships resulted in collaborative content generation. Users in SCP and GIP communities have specialized skills in generating content, and they, therefore, generate content together on the same theme. Intimate users communicate instant messengers or SMS to discuss how to generate contents and exchange files. A participant in SCP answered:

*"Then, my friends... um, after we got to know each other, one of my friends edited a picture to match my writing, and sent it to me. So I uploaded that picture with my writing."*

*[SCP1, female, 24 years old, university student]*

### 4.3. Context of situation

#### 4.3.1. Interface for user response

Users respond to generators content through replies or recommendations. Their recognition, encouragements, or recommendation of contents encourage users and helps further content generation. However, users in SCP had difficulty in selecting posts to read, because SCP provided numbers of replies only.

*"At other sites, if I like the content, I can reply and recommend it. But, in here, we only have the reply function. Read count doesn't have any meaning, because, we reply when the content is good, but we might read just out of curiosity."* *[SCP1, female, 24 years old, university student]*

So, users in SCP use a freeware which helps users more conveniently use SCP site, such as mark the number of replies in different colors. It also gives bookmark function to other bulletin boards, easy-to-replying function, enhanced searching function and image auto-resizing function. This program is developed by an anonymous user in SCP and updated continuously.

#### 4.3.2. Shared interest

Content generators tried to reflect others interests to writings, pictures, or videos. Shared interest is important because it enables content regeneration or induces users to

continuously generate content. Users in all three communities paid attention to what site users need and are interested in. They generated content which matched other users interests. Some of our participants said they are considering other users needs:

*“As you know, many people in the site want hero and heroine really go with. So, I usually focus two people when I take pictures.” [SCP2, female, 36 years old, housewife]*

Users find shared interest of community by reading posts steadily. Users called this as *„review*. They review hundreds or thousands of posts uploaded in a day. However, reading all posts is nearly impossible. So, they selectively read past posts. Firstly, users read posts that uploaded by users they well know or famous. Enhanced relationship influence the reading habit of users. Secondly, users selectively read posts that are marked high number of view or recommendation. One participant mentioned her reading habit for finding shared interest:

*“First, when I joined here, I read all of the posts. But, now I read post by the nickname or ID of users.” [GIP2, female, 30 years old, office worker]*

#### 4.4. Skill of Generator

##### 4.4.1. Specialized skill of generator

In the UCC community, a content generator's success is determined by their skill in content generation and how they select a theme for generation. A-list users in SCP usually focused on editing pictures or writing humorous article. User S1 in SCP uploaded a total of 4,491 posts and most of them were high quality captured and retouched pictures of drama. Pictures of S1 were widely used as a source for retouched contents. And S1 was recognized as a high performer in GIP, CSS and even overseas users. Users in GIP relatively largely focused on making relationship with other users compared with SCP and CSS. They held events such as collecting generated contents and gave them to producers of drama as a gift. Also they lead conversations and shared their daily life. B4 and B5 were

interested in making relationship with others as well as contents generation. These two users uploaded 355 and 305 pictures, writings, or short messages each, and they received replies from others higher than others (14.23, 10.02). CSS users continuously uploaded pictures and writings. Although they did not actively participated like users in SCP or CSS, they had the skills to upload continuously, and with a varied repertoire of content. However, not all users in CSS participated continuously. And some of them visit community when they publicize their contents or needs helps.

User skill is also related to how they select a theme. Most participants said that they uploaded contents about which they were experts. A participant in SCP said:

*“Some users began to imitate the theme of my writings. I'm famous here because of that theme. I was a little worried about that, but I wrote again about different, new, themes. I tried to approach many different ways of writing, which is my specialty.” [SCP1, female, 24 years old, university student]*

Active content generators usually have specialized content generation skill and utilized it. Skill helps to win reputation and continuous content generation.

##### 4.4.2. Source of contents

Content generators obtain source of contents in various ways: self, inside community, and from others. Users who take pictures of celebrities acquire the source of content by themselves. The other way is re-using contents that already posted on community. For example, one participant said she save pictures on her computer for future use:

*“I made folders in my computer. Whenever I saw good pictures, I saved them all. And I retouched one of them after.” [SCP1, female, 24 years old, university student]*

Users also obtain original source of contents from peer-to-peer service. It is because they want to make high resolution of contents by using high quality of movie files. For making high resolution pictures or videos, high quality

movie files are necessary. One participant in CSS said:

*"I need high quality of files. To make movable GIF files, I have to capture the movie file at least in 0.1 seconds. So, I sometimes download movie clips from p2p service."* [CSS1, male, 20 years old, university student]

#### 4.5. Response of Audience

##### 4.5.1. Response to praises

Total number and percentage of replies which are related with praises, encourages of contents are summarized in table 1. Result shows A-list user in CSS received highest percentage (12%) of replies about praises or encourages. This user continuously uploaded creative novels for 164 times. SCP was 2.0% and A-list users in GIP received 4.0% replies of encourages or praises.

Users judged the content generation ability of a user by the frequency of content upload or the amount of replies to their posts. A participant said about the process of gaining recognition:

*"User S1 consistently uploaded pictures, and so we wondered who he was. And replies were important; replies and read counts [mattered]. We usually replied to the contents of those users."* [SCP1, female, 24 years old, university student]

As following participant answered, praises and recognition from audience encourage content generation activities.

*"It was replies. If the drama was famous, the number of replies was very high. That really encouraged me to make more content."* [CSS1, male, 20 years old, university student]

##### 4.5.1. Response of shares interests

The other function of responding to contents is shaping shared interest. The result of reply analysis which is related with agreement, showing interest, extend the meaning of original content is summarized in table 2.

In all three communities, more than half of replies were about making shared interests. Especially, analysis by theme shows more than 70% of replies were related with

Table 1 Replies of praises, encourages, or recommendation of contents

	SCP	GIP	CSS
<b>A-list</b>	2.0% (232)	4.0% (181)	12.0% (384)
<b>Theme</b>	3.8% (304)	8.4% (386)	0.7% (11)

Table 2 Replies of shared interest

	SCP	GIP	CSS
<b>A-list</b>	66.6% (6,794)	58.5% (2,469)	69.9% (2,197)
<b>Theme</b>	73.8% (5,793)	78.0% (3,589)	86.3% (1,362)

shared interests (73.8% in SCP, 78.0% in GIP, 86.3% in CSS). Thread which derived from uploaded content was consensus of their interests. Accumulation in thread forms shared interests, and it is reflected on generated contents. One participant answered about the process of shaping shared interest as follows:

*"It's something like a boom. If users are continuously uploading posts that we can share, we reply and talk about other related topics, leading to better content."* [SCP1, female, 24 years old, university student]

Response to contents influences the modifying original contents. Content generators observe the response of users and modify or attach contents.

## 5. DISCUSSION

From theoretical perspective, this study contributes three key findings to the literature. First, we broaden our understanding of users in communities where common users are participated content generation activities. In UGC communities, most of users can generate contents even they have no experiences and are not skilled. In our study, many users did not have content generation experiences before they participated in each UGC communities.

Second, users have different motivations and they determined the different characteristics of community activities. Users who have hedonic purpose participated content generation actively as well as users who were driven by needs or other monetary incentives. If users are not interested in making relationship or they just want to show up their contents to others, might take passive attitude toward relationship making.

From a practical point of view, this study provides guidelines for designing a UCC community. First of all, UCC communities should provide clear copyright guidelines rather than regulate copyright violating contents. Also they should consider the importance of not only companies copyright but also that of users. Site administrators should consider the ways of preserve UCC and give back to users when they delete them. For example, they can email to users with the downloadable URL of contents or HTML page of deleted content within certain period. Second, monetary reward system should be initiated after the fair criterion is established. User also thought the monetary reward positively because it is a kind of by-product of their content generation activities. Third, it will be more effective for UCC vitalization to provide content generation support tools. It will be useless if editing tool is not reachable at the right time and right place, even the community provides a fine editing tool. Add quick menu or most popular used tool menu will help users to generate contents easily.

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