

**The Future Digital Economy
Digital Content – Creation, Distribution and Access**

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**Comments by Urs Gasser, Professor and Director, Research Center for Information Law,
University St. Gallen**

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I had the pleasure to chair a panel on new user habits and social attitudes at the OECD's Rome conference entitled "The Future Digital Economy: Digital Content Creation, Distribution and Access." On the panel was a wonderful group of experts:

Dr. David Day, Nielsen's/Net Ratings' Director for Europe, the Middle East and Africa was presenting data on Internet use and online behavior with focus on the EU;

Dr. John Horrigan, Associate Director for Research at the Pew Internet & American Life Project presented recent surveys on broadband usage in the U.S.;

David Sifry, Founder, President and CEO of Technorati was talking about the development and measurement of weblogs as well as the overall evolution of the blogosphere

Frieda Brioschi, President Wikipedia and Wikimedia Italy, shared thoughts about current trends and developments in peer-production projects like Wikipedia; and

Dr. Jens Uwe Intat used the case of games to show how emerging user habits and social attitudes are changing the ways we consume entertainment.

From David Day's and John Horrigan's presentations I caught the following data points:

More than 150 million W Europeans with Internet access and still growing.

95% of established Internet users are using the Net at home, 49% at work, 23% at educational institutions, 18% in the Internet cafe, 14% in public libraries.

The top-device to access the Internet is the Pc/Mac (91%), followed by laptop (33%), mobile phones (18%), digital TV (5%), PDAs (4%) and game consoles (4%).

Typical online behavior in a month includes: search (94%), general interest/portals (86%), web services/internet tools (75%), mass merchandisers (73%), auctions (66%), email (54%), online banking (53%) and community sites (53%).

36% of adult Americans have high-speed connections at home.

The following percentage of the age group 35 & under has ever been engaged in the following activities: 20% blog; 39% sharing creative work online; 35% sharing any online content.

A December survey by Pew shows that having a broadband connection at home continues to have a transformative impact on users. The three areas of impact are: (i) increased reliance on the Internet for news and information; (ii) heavy use of the Internet for gaming and entertainment; (iii) use of the Net to satisfy creative needs (amateur content production).

Here are my personal take home points from the panel discussion:

Empirical as well as anecdotal evidence (case studies) suggest fundamental changes in the way we access, use, create, and distribute information, knowledge, and entertainment.

(1) Access:

Broadband has arrived and is creating a critical mass.

In large part due to broadband technology, the Internet is increasingly embedded in our daily lives.

(2) Use:

Technology matters, too, not only specific user demographics.

We heavily use services that require some sort of content intermediaries (search engines, news aggregators, games).

(3) Creation:

Weblogs play a key role in bottom-up content creation, both in the EU and the US.
Peer-produced projects such as Wikipedia are prime examples of new modes of content production

(4) Distribution:

Large-scale P2P file-sharing, for legitimate and illegitimate purposes, is persistent.
Increasingly important is sharing of self-created content.

In conclusion, it seems to me that we are at the beginning of a long, multi-layered discussion that is likely to be increasingly centered on access and creation rather than (P2P) distribution.