

Describe the advantages disadvantages of websites which contain user-generated co...



User-Generated Content (UGC) is currently one of the most dominant forms of content in the Internet. Also known as Consumer-Generated Media (CGM), it pertains to “ any material created and uploaded to the Internet by non-media professionals” (Interactive Advertising Bureau [IAB], 2008).

In the context of UGC, the expression “ Even an idiot can use the Internet” is an understatement. Examples of UGC include a comment left on Amazon.com, a proletarian video uploaded to YouTube and a student’s profile on Facebook (IAB, 2008).

It would be fair to say that UGC has further democratized the concept of the Internet. Most forms of UGC today are run either on open-source software or applications, making these accessible and affordable to the general public. In the process, average Internet users, most of whom have access to high-speed Internet and search technology, are transformed into the “ creator, consumer and distributor of (Web) content” (IAB, 2008).

But critics often point out that the egalitarian and accessible nature of UGC likewise has detrimental effects on users. The massive influx of information offered by UGC has resulted in contentious issues such as invasion of privacy and cyber harassment.

#### More Informed Consumer Decisions

One of the most popular UGC websites today is review sites, where consumers share personal experiences with certain brands or establishments. The main objective of review sites is to help buyers make

more informed purchasing decisions by providing first-hand accounts from ordinary consumers themselves.

Most review sites are well-moderated and rate goods and services in an honest but courteous and professional manner. Some are even “(brand-friendly) to the company that respects their culture and is willing to participate (in the ratings)” (IAB, 2008).

### Opinions at Light Speed

Since Open Diary was launched in 1998, the blog has been an unstoppable Internet phenomenon. A blog (short for weblog) is a personal journal or diary that a user maintains on the Web. In its purest form, a blog is very interactive – anyone on the Internet can view it and post comments on its entries.

Blogs nowadays have a wide range of subjects, from pets to political issues. Blogs have been so popular among Internet users that publications like Newsweek and The New York Times have already created their own blogs in order for readers to be able to share casual observations (IAB, 2008).

### “ Friendships” in One Click

The advent of websites such as Facebook, MySpace and Bebo has become a venue for Internet users to express themselves, as well as to find others who share their interests. Users in a social networking site have a profile page that contains personal information like hometown, hobbies, interests, etc.

They may invite one another to be “ friends” because of offline friendships, mutual interests, common professional objectives or mutual acquaintances.

Social networking sites likewise allow users to swap comments, photos, videos and Web links (IAB, 2008).

### Invasion of Privacy

One of the most common arguments against UGC is that it unwittingly exposed the lives of private people to public scrutiny. Because blogs and social networking sites place emphasis on individual expression, users are encouraged to be open to the point that they are already being downright offensive. It is not usual for Internet users to come up with blogs detailing their sex life or to post suggestive pictures of themselves in their profile pages.

### Cyber Harassment

The proliferation of UGC websites has resulted in the rise in cyber harassment. An increasing number of individuals now fall victim to blogs and websites that contain offensive material against them.

There are even some cases where users receive death threats through email or mobile phones. Victims of cyber harassment are often reluctant to report their experience to the proper authorities out of embarrassment and the misconception that what their harassers did to them was “ free speech.”

### Conclusion

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Because of UGC, the Internet became a venue that was closely identifiable with the average individual. The Web was no longer a domain that was reserved for a few content creators and media distributors.

Any Internet user can now avail of sites in which he or she can express himself or herself. Given the egalitarianism that UGC offers, it is no longer surprising if the Web user became Time Magazine's Person of the Year for 2006.

But the freedom that UGC brings must be used responsibly. Stricter laws must be created in order to ensure that UGC websites will not be used to violate the rights of other people. UGC, akin to other technologies, must be used for human advancement and not for repression.

## **References**

Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB). (2008). IAB Platform Status Report: User-Generated.