

Open Source Film-Making: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract

Film-making was once considered as an expensive career option. Films are made on budgets of huge amount of money expecting a huge return on their investment. With the advent of digital technology, New Media and Social Media, an alternative mode of film-making has emerged- Open Source Film or open-content film. These are films that are produced and distributed by using free and open-source software's. The paper deals with the opportunities created in the creative expression and the democratization of the film industry through open source film movement and the challenges it faces in various aspects. It also undertake some glimpses from such films to analyze the common features and characteristics of open source films. The rules, regulations, licenses and issues like copyright and copyleft are also discussed in the paper. The present status, future prospects, opportunities and challenges of open source films when different forms of closed or proprietary models dominate in the film industry.

Keywords

Open Source film-making movement, Open Source Initiative (OSI), copyright, copyleft, authorship and Creative Commons' licenses

Introduction

In earlier days, the film production was viewed as an expensive process in which costly equipments like film cameras, lights, technical equipments, big sets, big studios, celebrity artists and huge amount of money were involved. Films were made on big budgets expecting a good return on their investment. Besides, it was considered as an industry to which film-goers and viewers cannot get an easy access.

The scenario starts to change with the gradual adoption of digital technology occurs. The digital technology demystified cinema production earlier afforded only by the giants in the film field and democratized the film-making. The invisible barriers to entry are crumbled and the doors of entry to film production became wide open to anyone with talent, aptitude and an interest in film-making.

With the emergence of digital technology, many new comers came forward with quality low-budget films. Besides, the existing film-makers started to make experimental and artistic low budget films without concerning much about the box office success.

This new situation initiated an alternative mode of film-making - Open Source Film-making. Fuelled by the open source software movement, Open-source films/ open-content films/free-content films emerged as a new avatar and gave a new dimension to the democratization of film industry.

Open Source films are freely available to be used, changed and shared in modified or unmodified form by anyone who is interested. Sources of such films are available for free access. The license used for those films meets the demands of the Open Source Initiative (OSI), a global non-profit that supports and promotes the open source movement.

Definition

Based on the OSI's open-source software definition and the definition of free cultural licenses, the definition of an open-source film can be applied to films where:

1. The license of the movie is approved for free cultural works. Specifically this is true for the Creative Commons licenses.
2. The materials used in the movie (sources) are also available under a license which is approved for free cultural works.
3. The movie and its sources are made publicly available via an online download or by other means that are either free or with a cost that covers reasonable reproduction expenses only.

4. The sources should be viewable and editable with free/open-source software. If this is not the case, they must be convertible into such a format by using free/open-source software. The same applies to the movie itself.
5. It should be possible to re-create or re-assemble the movie using the source materials.

Films or film projects which do not meet these criteria are either not open source or partially open source.

In 1998, prominent personalities in the world of open source movement, Bruce Perens and Eric Raymond started non-profit organization, namely, The Open Source Initiative (OSI) for the promotion of open-source software. The Open Source Initiative (OSI) principles are listed as:

1. Free Redistribution
2. Source Code
3. Derived Works
4. Integrity of The Author's Source Code
5. No Discrimination against Persons or Groups
6. No Discrimination against Fields of Endeavour
7. Distribution of License
8. License must not be Specific to a Product
9. License must not Restrict Other Software
10. License must be Technology-Neutral (Open Source Initiative, 2006)

Objectives

- To understand the concept, features and aspects of Open-source film
- To understand different tools and methods in the process of Open-source film-making
- To know major films and works produced through Open-source film-making.
- To analyze the present status future prospects, opportunities and challenges of open source films

Methodology

The study is being carried out using the method of Exploratory research as it is an attempt to lay the initial groundwork that may lead to future studies in this area.

Theoretical background

The concepts of spectatorship, copyright and copyleft emerge as the theoretical background of the Open-Source film-making movement. In the media scenario,

Open-source films give spectator the chance to personalize a creative work where the users can modify to make a new version of it.

Peter Greenaway, filmmaker, suggests to re-invent cinema with the new opportunities of multimedia tools, new experiences of perception, interaction and collaboration.

The role and nature of spectator in the context of Open-source films is an area that has to be discussed and studied. The concept of spectatorship was first developed 'theoretically' in the mid-1970s in the context of studies of semiotics on film theory. Referring Anne Friedberg, Rodowick asserts "spectators become 'users', manipulating interfaces as simple as a remote control or as complex as data gloves and head-mounted displays"

In addition, the concepts like copyright and copyleft can be incorporated to the theoretical fabric of Open-Source film-making. World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) defines the copyright concept as a "legal term describing rights given to creators for their literary and artistic works"

Analysing the historical development of the copyright concept, Liang observes that early regulations were simply about the publishers' right to copy.

"In a broad historical and cultural view, copyright is a recent and by no means universal concept. Copyright laws originated in Western society in the Eighteenth century. During the Renaissance, printers throughout Europe would reprint popular books without obtaining permissions or paying royalties and copyright was created as a way to regulate the printing industry. With the emergence of the concept of artistic genius, copyright became enmeshed with the general cultural understanding of authorship" (Liang, 2005, p.13).

The early legal regulation in a national level was started in 1710 by Act Anne in Great Britain and first international attempt to construct a framework on intellectual property was in the 1883 Paris Convention.

When adapted into the free software movement, the idea of copyleft became popular.

In order to avoid the ambiguity of the "free" software which may indicate a meaning 'no money charged', an effort was made in 1998, to rebrand the term, 'free software' to 'open source'. In this context, Eric Raymond, Netscape's computer programmer and writer wrote a call to the hacker community with the title 'Goodbye free software'; hello 'open source'. Tapscott and Williams in

Wikinomics describes the motto of open source code as ' "nobody owns it, everybody uses it, and anybody can improve it"

The free software approach is for accessing to the source code with the permissions to use, to develop and to share without any restriction but giving the credits to the original contributors and publish the contributions in the same conditions.

"Copyleft is a general method for making a program or other work free, and requiring all modified and extended versions of the program to be free as well" (Stallman, 2002, p.89).

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Major Open Source Films

This film, titled, 'Sita Sings The Blues' is one of the examples of how the system of copyright stamp down the creative production.

Nina Paley, animator, writer and producer released 80-minutes animated open source feature film based on the Indian epic The Ramayana titled 'Sita Sings The Blues' for free under a CC Attribution-Share Alike license in March of 2009.

Nina Paley spent almost three years to make the film and got good reception at film festival circuits. But, she could not make the distribution of the film due to licensing issues of the music used in the film. In spite of being out of copyright, the recordings of music by singer Annette Hanshaw were protected by state commerce and business laws passed at the period in the absence of applicable federal laws and were never truly "public domain".

Following the issue, Nina Paley was demanded unable to pay the approximately \$220,000 by the copyright holders and a fee of \$50,000 was negotiated to secure license the music in 2009. It is one of the indications that how licensing concerns dominate over their artistic and creative vision.

She opted to work with non-profit organization, Question Copyright to make the open source film venture by putting digital files freely available on the Internet. Surprisingly, the film gained big popularity and grossed more than six times more in the very first year than a distributor had offered for the film.

Produced almost completely using the free software 3D suite Blender, Elephants Dream is a well accepted open source film with duration 10 minutes. It tells the story of complexities of a machine and how the characters deal with this it.

It was released online under a CC by license and acted as teaching tools - all the files were included in the release and helped in understanding and learning to find out how different compositional techniques were achieved.

Nasty Old People, a 2009 feature film by Swedish director Hanna Sköld, was released on The Pirate Bay (and other bit torrent sites) under a CC Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike license.

Another open-source movie released online under a CC BY license from Blender foundation in 2008 was Big Buck Bunny.

The film titled 'Sintel' was another open source venture from Blender Institute with the 12 GB of production files available on a 4 DVD package.

The Digital Tipping Point is a feature length open source documentary about the open source movement itself.

Valkaama, Route 66 – An American (Bad) Dream, Code Rush, Mob Mentality, Boy Who Never Slept, Dancing to Architecture and La chute d'une plumere_potemkin are some the open source films got attention.

RiP: A Remix Manifesto is an open-source documentary film directed by Brett Gaylor about "about copyright and remix culture".

Released in 2008 under a CC Attribution-Non Commercial license, the film has been permitted to be shared online and made interesting paths for derivative works. Open-source video platform Kaltura is used for community video editing of the film.

Brett, in film project, wanted to go beyond the idea of free sharing of resources and rushes. For the purpose, he started website Open Source Cinema

(www.opensourcecinema.org) where he asked users to participate to the film. With the contribution of users, the film took six years for completion. He was uploading the rushes of the interviews he got and was asked users to remix them. But, that attempt was a failure as the users were not much knowledgeable about the project and its treatment. Following this, he identified a few talented persons through social media and you tube and asked them to participate in the project. This was a successful model.

Software used in open source film-making

Important free software's that are popularly used for Open-source film-making are given below:

Editing

- Lightworks
- HyperEngine-AV – Equivalent to Adobe Premiere, Final Cut Pro
- Avidemux

Graphics

- Black Magic DaVinci Resolve Lite for powerful colour correction
- Gimp – Equivalent to Photoshop
- Inkscape – Equivalent to Adobe Illustrator

Audio

- Audacity - For basic audio recording
- Frinika - To compose a score for your movie

Animation

- Blender – Equivalent to Maya, 3DS Max
- Synfig – Equivalent to Flash
- Jahshaka – Equivalent to After Effects
- Cinepaint - For careful retouch of your footage, frame by frame, or just clean up still images

Web Development

- kompozer – Equivalent to Dreamweaver
- Cyberduck
- DVD Flick- A simple DVD authoring solution

Conclusion

There is an emerging shift from passive consumers to people who want to take a more active part in culture and create new things – new cultural products.

Creators can come from anywhere in the world – and be influenced by ideas from anywhere; there is an increasingly diverse set of cultural products that change how we think about the world. Open source licensing makes every cultural object a sample that can be legally used as a piece for the next cultural project.

Lawrence Lessig argues that “[a] society free to borrow and build upon the past is culturally richer than a controlled one” (Lessig, 2005) “A society that defends the ideals of free culture must preserve precisely the opportunity for new creativity to threaten the old” (Lessig, 2005).

An important question is that- How “open source” really will work when applied to video content? Compared to Open source movement, the un-edited video rushes cannot be treated as equivalent to source code in software. When the video material is used to create another version of the film, the original film stays intact. The user or viewer cannot alter the “original” movie, but can make another version of it utilizing the given or added material.

Being in a developing and experimental stage, the open -source film-making poses the question Do this model of film making create a new language of cinema? How the open source film-making model and the digital technologies will change the models of authorship/readership?

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