

A new alliance for digital content

copyright: why it is so, why it must change

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The production and distribution of knowledge and culture have undergone several changes throughout history, and the same can be said for the status of researchers, thinkers and creators. These changes have been brought about by the great forces that shape the history of human societies, such as the technological innovation, the cultural and social norms as well as, of course, the economic forces and class structure.

Digital media are part of a broad digital revolution which has already introduced a deep paradigm shift in the way we live, we think, and we produce and share information and culture, as well as they did in almost every and each facet of modern society, from industrial production to healthcare, from citizenship to warfare. Within this new paradigm, IP (intellectual property) is becoming the most valuable asset, especially when it comes to technological innovation (patents) and cultural content (copyright).

In this paper, I will focus on some issues related to copyright and digital media. The stated rationale of copyright is that it boosts the production of art and culture, by rewarding authors with a specific form of property, from which they can attain financial benefits as well as recognition. This specific form of protection has a well-established history: from a brief overview of this history, two main factors will emerge, namely a specific form of market economy and, even more relevant, a specific technology for the reproduction of the works of intellect. Thus, I will argue that the present form of copyright is the result of industrial capitalism and the printing press; therefore, the advent of de-centralised, network-based social and economic structure, as well as digital technologies and the de-materialisation of content are making substantial parts of the present IP construction increasingly obsolete, especially when it comes to copyright. In other words, publishers, as the middlemen in control of the whole process from the author's manuscript to the reader, may also have become obsolete.

To further elaborate the results of this brief excursus in history, in the second part of this work I will examine the current state of affairs of the digital world. I will focus on the debate on the web 2.0, in which user-generated content is distributed by a very small number of giant monopolies; I will also introduce the ideas for the so-called "web 3.0", in which the content is going to be arranged on P2P networks and other solutions based on de-centralisation and a more direct interaction between authors and users. These factors can have a profound impact on the issues of intellectual property, since the traditional copyright form may be considered, for a number of reasons that I will try to expose, unsuited to these new networks.

There are many reasons to strengthen the attribution of the ownership of a work of intellect to its authors in a "3.0" model. I will try to summarise them in the third part of the paper, by defining the need of financial compensation and social recognition in

an increasingly network-centric environment, based on micro-transaction, smart contracts, evolving IDs, shared items and “long tails”.

Finally, in the fourth part, I will try to outline the main requirements for a new form of intellectual property, whence authors and users can form a new alliance. These will be based on a new class of digital objects, fully traceable across transaction yet able to evolve in different versions and to be distributed along many different channels. Such a solution is not only technologically feasible (or at least it will be as such in a very near future), but it is also needed from an ethical standpoint, since empowering authors and readers is in the interest of both as well as in the general interest of society as a whole, far more than it is the current form of copyright.

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