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Critical Analysis of Social Processes and Goal Orientation in an Online Financial Community

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Abstract

The organisation and structure of many financial forums enable some individuals to systematically cultivate and exploit the uncertainty or enthusiasm of others. The manipulation can be intentional or unintentional and is usually motivated by a desire to affect an increase or decrease in the price of some security over a comparatively short period of time. This paper reports research investigating communication in an Internet finance forum as a social interaction process viewed through a critical discourse lens. A model of communicative practices is used to empirically analyse a small set of interpersonal interactions about stock price manipulation. Our analysis highlights how finance forums can be used for both communicative and strategic action. However, unlike other CMC environments, the structure of finance forums can facilitate manipulation through the use of multiple messages using one or more user identities.

Keywords

Web-based finance forums, virtual communities, stock market manipulation, communicative practices

Introduction

As the Internet has become more accessible, there has been a substantial increase in the amount of investment advice and information that can be accessed online. The Internet now plays an important role in keeping financial markets better informed by allowing private share investors better access to information about exchange traded securities anywhere in the world. Recognised sources of Internet-based information include the web sites of official securities exchanges, listed companies, and third party operators providing access to a variety of investment information including real-time market data, research and trading recommendations. However, in their search for legitimate information sources, many investors also seek out the investment rumours and tips that are frequently posted to Internet-based finance forums. By drawing on the transcripts of an Australian Online Finance Forum, this paper explores the ways the forum was appropriated by participants and the nature of their communicative practices. By analysing these communicative practices the paper aims to

contribute to the understanding of communicative distortions in online finance forums and their potential impacts.

Finance Forum Discourse as Social Interaction

Individuals participating in Internet-based finance forums usually pursue the aim of being, becoming or being seen as successful stock investors and traders. At the same time they portray a particular image of themselves to make an impression on other forum participants and sometimes to manipulate and exert power in relation to others. As a result, their involvement in the communicative practices of forum discourse reflects the aims as well as the strategies adopted to achieve those aims. For example, a forum participant whose primary goal is ethical investing may adopt a strategy of strictly following forum rules so as to publicly demonstrate a high regard for community values. On the other hand, another participant concerned only with maximising investment returns may not be so pedantic in obeying forum rules or community. We may draw a tentative conclusion here that different aims and the consequent strategies used to achieve them produce different communicative practices that, in turn, contribute to the success of a forum.

Internet forum environments generally challenge the limits of interpersonal communication. As a social form of communication, Internet forums can be used for different purposes: to achieve understanding and collaborate with other human beings with similar interests or to influence others and manipulate them for personal gains. Communicative distortion can occur in online environments in much the same way as it does in face-to-face situations. What makes a difference in online forums is the ability of participants to think about views and propositions expressed in postings before relying or acting and to reflect on past behaviour of individual participants based on forum history. In addition, a Web-based social interaction is more amenable to the analysis of communicative practices due to the text by-product of the online communication process.

Communicative Practices in Forums

Collaboration within virtual communities is primarily mediated by language. Communicative or linguistic acts function as social interaction mechanisms. An examination of the interacting role and constitutive power of linguistic acts in establishing and maintaining knowledge is therefore necessary in order to gain deeper insights into collaboration within Internet finance forums.

The prerequisite for this examination is the understanding of the performative meaning of linguistic acts explained by speech act theory. Apart from having a literal meaning, a speech act also has a performative meaning. That is, not what is said but what the saying enacts (Austin 1962 and Searle 1979). In this study, we investigate and classify linguistic acts as constitutive of social processes involving knowledge creation processes. Understanding the types of linguistic acts that constitute collaboration within digital communication environments will be invaluable in assessing the specific implications involved in collaborative online knowledge creation processes.

Linguistic Acts Constituting Social Processes

Forum participants exchange linguistic acts in order to develop understanding and construct knowledge in the subject matter domain. They also use other types of acts to refer to norms and rules assumed to govern their interaction and the process of discourse itself. They may, for example, dispute some norms or rules, provide arguments to change them, and seek agreement from others. In all these examples, participants are referring to a particular kind of knowledge, defined by norms and rules, that refer to the social world. Individuals use yet another type of linguistic acts to express their expectations, attitudes and feelings about forum communication and their satisfaction with interaction processes.

Clearly different types of linguistic acts, referring to different domains of knowledge, are used to do different things (Forester 1992). Often, however, the same linguistic act may have multiple performative meanings. Cecez-Kecmanovic and Webb (2000) proposed a formal classification of linguistic acts according to knowledge domain. That is, knowledge about (1) the subject matter, (2) norms and rules governing the interaction processes and (3) the personal experiences, desires and feelings related to communication. The characteristics of linguistic acts of a particular domain are therefore defined as:

Speech acts addressing the subject matter and the topic of discussion

- raising claims, providing arguments, reasons, grounds
- disputing claims, providing counter-arguments and grounds
- seeking understanding either by sharing, expressing or imposing beliefs
- seeking clarification
- (re) interpreting meaning

Speech acts addressing norms and rules governing the communication process of

- organising, regulating and directing the process of interaction
- establishing or disputing rules of conduct and speech (normative regulation of the process of interaction)
- claiming that some norms or rules are violated (acts that relate practical discourse to accepted norms or rules)

Speech acts addressing personal experiences, desires and feelings

- expressing personal views about, assessment of, or expectations from the communication process
- expressing an individual reflexive perception of the communication process
- expressing personal attitudes to cooperation and respect for others (heedful interrelating, intention to influence others, wish to dominate and exert control, etc.)

Social Processes and Goal Orientation in Discourse

Speech acts cannot be fully explained by reference to knowledge domain only. The orientation of forum participants must also be described before the performative meaning (what saying enacts) can be understood. Based on Habermas' (1984) theory of communicative action that identifies two major orientations of participants in the communication process –

orientation to success and orientation to understanding -- Cecez-Kecmanovic and Webb (2000) defined three dominant action orientations in collaborative learning situations, which we interpret for our purpose as follows:

- Orientation to knowledge sharing and creation - manifested as a wish to interact with others to increase mutual understanding and discuss and test alternative or new ideas and concepts.
- Orientation to achieving an end - manifested as an intention to succeed. For example, to trade and invest successfully or better than other forum members.
- Orientation to self-presentation - manifested as achieving an impression on others, portraying a particular image of self.

Model of Communicative Practices

The communicative practices model presented in Table 1 integrates the two aspects of communicative analysis with the knowledge domain of different linguistic acts (subject matter; norms and rules; and personal experiences) along one dimension, and the dominant action orientation (knowledge creation; achieving ends and self-presentation) along the other. This framework can be used to investigate any conversation in terms of what and how it contributes to the construction and maintenance of collaborative knowledge creation processes and community building. Although certain linguistic acts may be of the same type, what is actually produced depends on the individual's action orientation.

The communicative practices model of collaboration can be used to assess the conditions necessary for the development of an ideal communication environment for Internet finance forums that is based on the concepts of the 'ideal speech situation' defined by Habermas (1984). The ideal communication environment is defined here as social interaction free from any kind of distortion, any form of coercion or ideology and "excludes all force... except the force of the better argument" (Habermas, 1984, p. 25). While we do not expect the ideal communication environment to ever be fully achieved in practice, we find this concept relevant for judging the success of Internet forums. Namely, the higher the degree of satisfaction of ideal communication environment, the more likely it is that a forum will achieve its purpose. Note here that there are no measures of satisfaction of ideal communication conditions. However, it can be seen that these conditions are progressively better approximated from the bottom level of the self-presentation orientation towards the top level of the knowledge creation orientation as shown in Table 1.

The degree to which the ideal communication environment is achieved depends on various forms of distortion. The distortion of communication by an individual orientated to self-presentation may for example involve ignorance of others and over-insistence on personal views and opinions; disregard for the desires and wishes of others; instrumentalisation of trust and relationships among group members; and the relegation of the forum to a platform for personal promotion. The kinds of distortion by individuals oriented to achieving goals might include linguistic acts aimed at influencing the opinions and beliefs of others, and maintaining relationships with others to serve their own particular goals, etc. The presence of these communicative distortions usually disrupts collaborative processes and, if persistent and severe, may even cause a complete breakdown of communication on a forum. On the other hand, individuals predominantly oriented to creating and sharing knowledge do so in a

cooperative way. Guided by the force of better argument, they seek to establish mutual understanding and respect for others with different viewpoints.

<i>Knowledge Domains</i> <i>Goal Orientation</i>	Subject Matter (1)	Norms and Rules (2)	Personal Experiences, Desires and Feelings (3)
Knowledge Creation and Sharing (A)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising claims related to the subject matter in order to establish mutual beliefs; providing arguments and grounds for a claim aiming at knowledge sharing • Testing and disputing claims with reasons, providing counter-arguments and grounds with the aim of reaching understanding • Argumentation guided by the force of better argument 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts establishing mutually acceptable norms and rules regulating, organising and directing the process of interaction • Acts of disputing (assumed or accepted) norms and rules seeking cooperative resolution • Acts of cooperative assessment of legitimacy, social acceptability and rightness of behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts expressing personal views, assessment of or expectations from the communicative process aimed at mutual understanding • Acts expressing an individual reflexive relation to the forum • Acts expressing personal attitudes to cooperation, respect for others and their different opinions, views and values
Achieving Ends (B)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising or disputing claims and providing arguments, with an intent to frame attention, influence others and achieve goals • Particular (manipulative) re-interpretation of meaning of the comments made by other forum participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts of influencing organisation and normative regulation of the interaction process that suit particular actor interests • Acts of influencing the change of norms and rules so as to better suit achieving personal goals • Maintaining interpersonal relationships for the achievement of goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts expressing intention to influence others • Acts expressing an individual reflexive relation to the communication process in relation to personal success • Acts expressing personal disrespect for others or paying attention only to the extent that serves a participant's aims
Self-Promotion and Representation (C)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking understanding with others through the acts of performing • Raising, disputing and resolving claims perceived not as argumentation leading to shared knowledge but as a stage for personal representation and promotion, a performance in which some win and others lose • Lack of appreciation for facts and opinions claimed by others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts of organising and directing the process of interaction that demonstrates participant's leadership qualities, interpersonal relations etc. • Acts that relate practical discourse to accepted norms or rules; eg. claims that some norms or rules are violated for the sake of focusing attention and establishing oneself as a particular type of personae (eg.. fair, just, correct) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts aimed at projecting a certain impression to others • Acts revealing manipulative self-presentation aimed at dominating and controlling a situation or others • Disregarding the interests, wishes and desires of others

Table 1. Model of Communicative Practices (adopted from Cecez-Kecmanovic and Webb, 2000, p. 315)

However, in any particular forum thread, we cannot expect a natural inclination towards an ideal communicative environment or even a natural evolution towards such a situation. Rather we have to be sensitive to all kinds of distortions of communications that take place, either in an overt or covert way, that prevent cooperative knowledge sharing and construction, trust building and self-realisation. Understanding the nature of communication in the Internet finance forums and especially subtle ways of distorting communication will contribute to assessing the success of particular forums and also to designing new types of forums (including the rules and conditions of participation) and potentially new kinds of technological support for such forums.

The communicative practices model of collaboration can help us better understand the ways that forum participants interact, exchange linguistic acts and construct text-based virtual communities. This model can also lead us see beyond the words towards comprehending the acts. By virtue of its facilitating and mediating role, Internet finance fora provide transcripts of communication and thereby the data necessary to analyse communicative practices. These transcripts provide us with well preserved conversational “trail” of the online collaborative process.

Analysis of Communicative Practices: Forum Discussion about Stock Ramping

The inherent duality of finance forums provides a fertile research context for studying communicative practices in virtual communities. While these forums instil a strong sense of community and camaraderie in some, they are also seen as nefarious environments where others can systematically cultivate and exploit the uncertainty or enthusiasm of the naive and the innocent. Although there are a number of different strategies that can be used to manipulate stock prices, the best known method is called the “pump and dump”. This form of manipulation occurs when the scheme promoters use the demand generated by the false or misleading information that they have spread to sell their own shares. The promoters of such schemes frequently use this ploy with small, thinly traded companies because it is easier to manipulate a stock when there are fewer shares on issue.

Research Method

A mixed methods approach is employed in this study. An interpretive ethnographic analysis is used to provide the basis for interpreting the lived experience of the research subjects (Atkinson, 1990; Myers, 1999; Trauth, 2001). Particular emphasis is placed on narration in describing particular events that occurred at the research site. In general, the long-term experience of one of the authors in observing the forum culture makes possible the identification of exemplary events that encapsulate the sentiments and experiences of the group at a broader level. The experience, expertise and sensitivity of this investigator to the research context further informs this process. As the second author was not a participant in such forums, and therefore did not have contextual knowledge, she was able to question and check interpretations, especially those informed by the communicative model.

Data

The data analysed in this study consisted of text-based dialogue from a virtual community situated at a popular Australian finance forum. The forum has been in existence since 1995 and at the time the data was collected claimed more than 20,000 registered members and generated between four million and six million page impressions per month. Forum participants included amateur investors, day traders and professional brokers all of whom, despite their diversity of expertise, shared a common interest in stock market investment. Members were able to post messages on a range of financial topics in a bulletin-board style. Guidelines were provided to help participants conform to government regulations regarding investment advice and also to form the basis for moderating forum behaviour. A standard disclaimer notice was attached to every message posted to the forum. The disclaimer reminded the reader that some claims might not be accurate and to seek professional advice before taking any action.

The conversation data was identified through the emergence of highly evocative posts about a particular company, which was accompanied by considerable abnormal market activity (see Campbell 2001 for more detail). The company at the centre of the conversation had not attracted any notable mention prior to this event. In fact, the investigator had monitored this site for several years and during that time had not observed any mention of the company. In all, the captured conversation involved 126 posters contributing more than 600 messages over a period of 48 days during April and May 2000. To preserve anonymity, the company is referred to as Perilous NL (PER) and non-specific terms have been substituted for the names of all posters and other companies mentioned in the conversation. These substitutions can be identified within quoted text as they are enclosed by the *less than* (<) and *greater than* (>) symbols. The data collected and analysed in this study is considered to be of high quality and a particularly useful data set for the following reasons:

- The absence of *any* comment about the company in other forums or mass media prior to and during the initial stages of the forum conversation and anomalous market activity.
- The duration of the study period in which the posts were tracked and compared with market activity.
- The number of forum identities who participated in the conversation and the large number of posts made during the study period.
- The absence of official company announcements that might explain the market and/or forum activity.
- The forum speculation was ill founded as none of the rumoured corporate activity eventuated. This suggests that the forum speculation and associated anomalous market activity was largely a forum driven phenomenon and not based on insider information.

Illustrative Narrative of the Argumentation Process

The instigator of the conversation studied was an individual we will give the alias of "Stucco". Stucco was a regular and frequent poster to the forum, sometimes posting more than twenty messages a day. The conversation began with a single pre-emptive post by Stucco, which was clearly aimed at building suspense. The post read:

I hope you all had my hot list in your portfolio, <six stock codes>

Now for shock horror, I have sold the lot today and placing the proceeds one (sic) one Company. This does not mean that the above are not good stocks.

After I have put the house on it I will then post it.

My total commitment to this company will be around \$450K so when I post you better believe me.

100%+ speculated return.

I still hold <company code> but thats not it.

Please read the fine print below.

<note: disclaimer removed>

The following day the stock was identified through the following post:

Topic: ***Some of you have found my tip its moving*** <note: bold added>

From: stucco

Date: day +1 11:15

PER

<note: bold added>

Please read the fine print below.

<note: disclaimer removed>

An immediate search was initiated to check for other posts regarding this stock but no posts were found in the seven days preceding the first post. By the end of the day, Stucco had posted 19 posts relating directly to PER from his total for the day of 24 posts. Stucco devoted a great deal of effort in promoting momentum in this stock. The following are excerpts from various posts from Stucco on that day:

- 1) *Why do you think I have invested so heavilly into PER???*
Its pretty obvious its going dot com.
Now is the time for IN.
This is the chance to make some real dollars.
It will still be a buy at .60
- 2) *Wait and see the reply to the speeding ticket. You will be surprised.*
And look hardly any sellers.
- 3) *Do not doubt me on this one it will fly.*
Reminds me of <poster name> and <company code> now Look.
Do your research.
- 4) *The lid will come off real soon.*
And no I did not sell one share today!!

The immediate response by members of the forum was generally supportive with some indicating that they were prepared to follow Stucco's lead based on their perception of his reputation and credibility. However, several posters began to question some of the statements made by Stucco. The questions about credibility prompt Stucco to explain the financial complexities that prevented him from taking full advantage of the emerging situation. When questioned further, Stucco makes the following disclosures:

Topic: Another hot stock to watch (not buy) yet
 From: Stucco
 Date: day +2 14:33
*I still have my PER and I was not tempted when it hit .50
 Just too much upside on this stock.
 When they announce a deal and believe me they will, this stock might not have any trouble hitting over \$1.20 .
 If you think im exagerating im not.
 Anyone who sells to make a small profit is very short sighted.*

The stock I own are PER and <company code>

Please read the fine print below. <note: disclaimer removed>

Stucco implies that he is still buying when asked whether he still holds PER or not. Stucco's reply:

Topic: PER for the People, get your calculator out.
 From: Stucco
 Date: day +2 21:34
*Of course I do and just relize that I am in the top 54 club.
 Just gotta get in the top 20, what a challenge.*

Please read the fine print below. <note: disclaimer removed>

Some 37 days after his original post, there has been a major downward movement in the market with PER trading at around 30 percent below its price level when Stucco first began posting. In a post to the forum, Stucco is particularly exuberant about another stock from which he claims to have made a profit of \$28,000. This prompts another poster to question whether this profit has made up for the losses that he must have incurred on PER.

Topic: 28K Today all thanks to <company X>
 From: Stucco
 Date: day +37 01:46 PM
Should I take the profit?????????

No Way \$7.00+ in 6 weeks.

*There is no way Ive got this wrong.
 Please read the fine print below.* <note: disclaimer removed>

Topic: 28K Today all thanks to <company X>
 From: POSTER 117
 Date: day +37 01:59 PM
Has it made up for your loss on PER?????

<note: disclaimer removed>

Topic: 28K Today all thanks to <company X>
 From: Stucco
 Date: day +37 02:13 PM
What Loss ?????

In and out scream and shout.

<note: bold added>

Please read the fine print below.

<note: disclaimer removed>

Stucco's reply "in and out scream and shout" implies that he had traded PER and perhaps had used the forum to pump and dump the stock. Despite the criticism by others about his manipulative behaviour, Stucco's attitude to the whole affair is that he has done nothing wrong.

Topic: List of credible posters!

From: stucco

Date: day +38 01:12 PM

Sounds to me that somebody lost a lot of money and is Jelous to the max.

I do not ramp stocks, ramping is blatant lies about a stock.

If i am not sure I always say its speculation.

And why do you think there is a BIG DISCLAIMER on the bottom of the page.

I did not push, you jumped.

You are all responsible for your own finances. I am not a stockbroker.

I am here to make money not babysit.

So if you lose money its your fault.

Please read the fine print below.

<note: disclaimer removed>

Subsequent analysis of the posts made during this conversation revealed that stucco had used several identities to support his own arguments.

Event Data Analysis

Figure 1 displays the volume and price range data (high, low and close prices) during the study period. There is clear evidence of some event that took place between trading days one and two, which had a marked effect on the company stock price and trading volume. Not surprisingly, stock price volatility and trading volume appeared to be highly correlated. However, intraday stock price variability increased immediately after the initial forum postings began to appear and then remained consistently higher throughout the post-event study period.

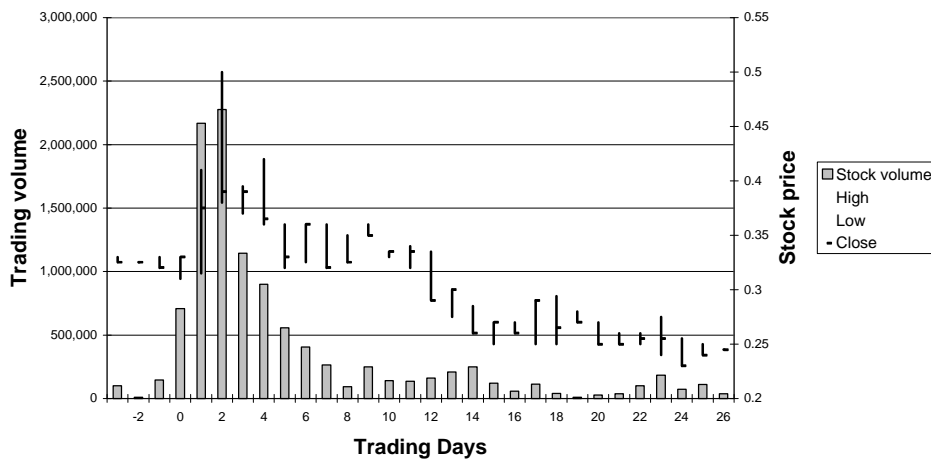


Figure 1. Trading volume and intraday price range of PER during the study period

Figure 2 shows the number of posts per day against the intraday high for each trading day. The most active period of posting occurred in the first seven days, which coincided with the very large volumes and high stock price volatility identified earlier in Figure 1. There was no discussion about this stock on the forum for at least six days prior to day zero. However once begun, the conversation continued throughout the whole study period with only three days where there were no posts on PER (posting-days 25, 26 and 34). The pattern of posts within the conversation appears cyclical with forum activity consistently increasing and then decreasing over time. Apart from the first seven days of posting activity, there appear to be at least three aftershocks of posting interest peaking on days 21, 32 and 37.

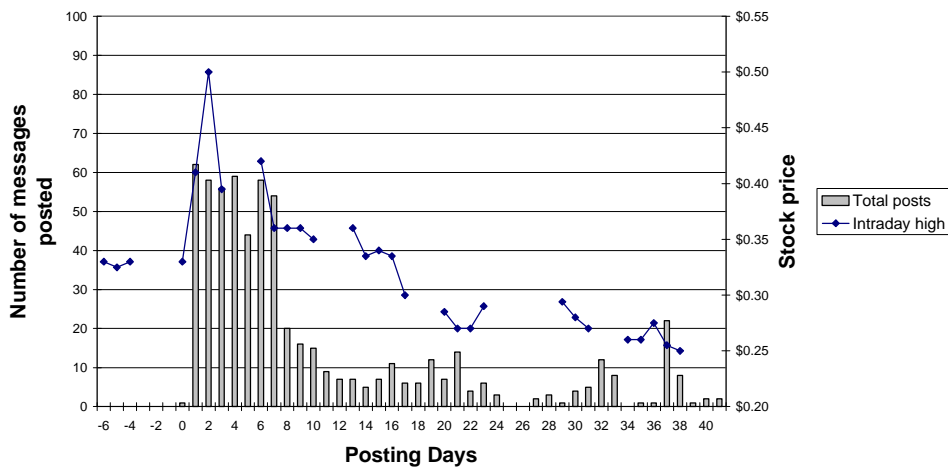


Figure 2. Number of posts against the intraday stock price high for PER

Figure 3 shows the number of contributors to the conversation during the study period. The pattern of participation described in Figure 3 tracks a similar pattern to that found in Figure 2. Both figures indicate that the most active period within the conversation in terms of both

posters and postings occurred during the first few days, which also concurs with the period of high stock price variability and trading volume previously identified in Figure 1.

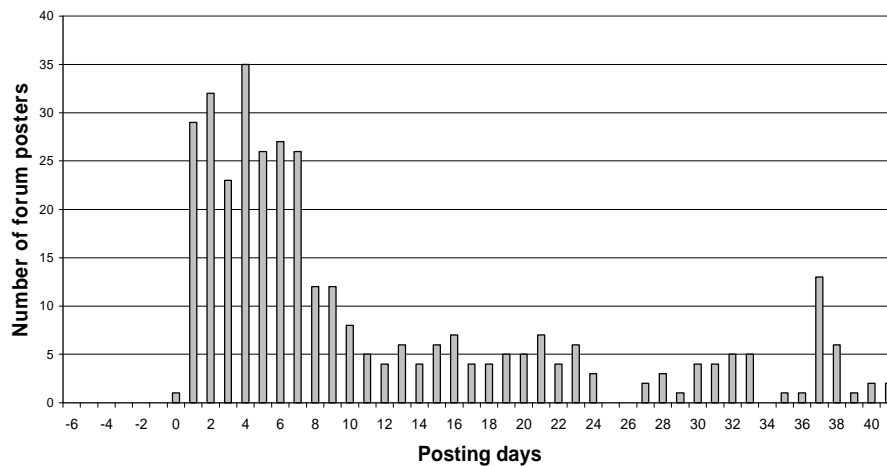


Figure 3. Number of unique posters to the PER conversation for each posting day

Table 2 shows the frequency and nature of communicative practices displayed by participants in the first 72 hours of the PER conversation. These posted messages are coded using classification from Table 1 (eg. messages oriented to **Achieving Ends** and referring to **Subject Matter** are coded **B1**; messages oriented to **Knowledge Creation and Sharing** and referring to **Personal Experiences, Desires and Feelings** are coded **A3**). The results are presented in Table 2. The action orientation of participants during this time period has been distilled from this data and is illustrated in Figure 4. Similarly, the knowledge domain addressed in each posted message has also been extracted and is illustrated in Figure 5.

Day	A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	Totals
1	6	7	7	27	25	20	2	1	3	98
2	5	8	12	16	19	16	1	5	9	91
3	10	2	7	18	15	25	0	0	6	83
Totals	21	17	26	61	59	61	3	6	18	272

Table 2. Knowledge domains and action orientation of forum posts during the first 72 hours of the PER forum conversation

Table 2 shows that the number of communicative acts expressed during each of the three days were very similar in quantum (98, 91 and 83 communicative acts respectively). However, most of the communication activity centred on achieving ends (B1, B2 and B3). Communicative acts aimed at achieving ends were spread across all three knowledge domains – subject matter; norms and rules; and personal experiences, desires and feelings. Interestingly, there was comparatively little apparent self-promotion action orientation during

this period with just less than ten percent of communicative acts displaying self-promotion characteristics. However, most self-promotion and representation acts were based on personal experiences, desires and feelings.

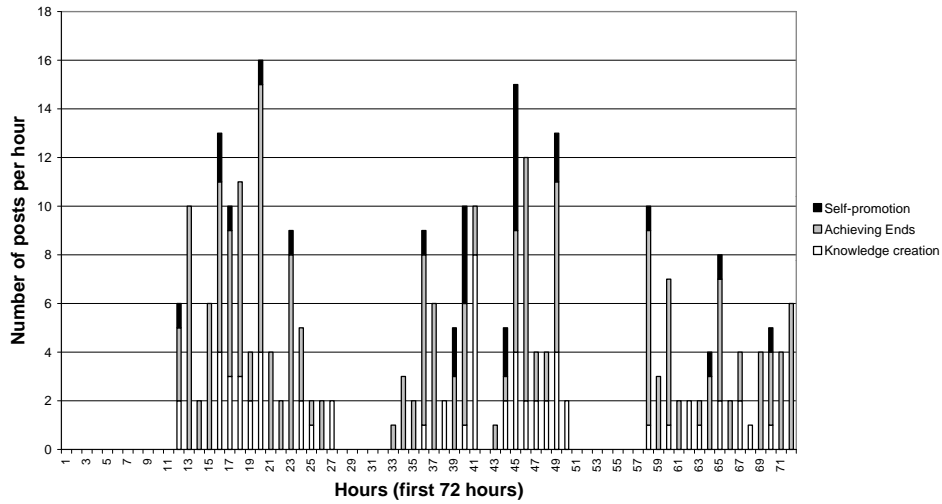


Figure 4. Participant action orientation

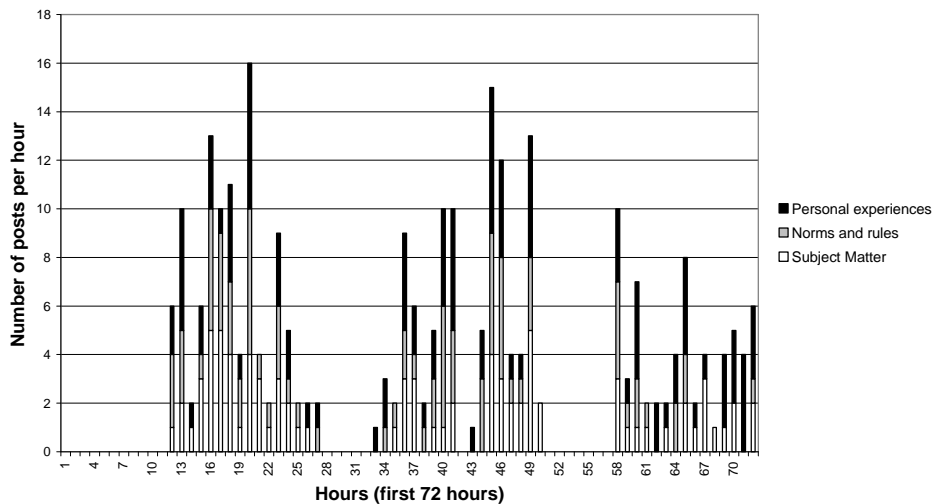


Figure 5. Participant knowledge domain expressed in posts

Discussion

A preliminary analysis of the finance forum data using a communicative practices framework has revealed several communication patterns of interest. As expected, the communicative acts analysed were mostly focused on an achieving ends (B) goal orientation. However, the contents of the message texts were almost evenly distributed across all knowledge domains. In contrast, communicative acts oriented towards knowledge creation and sharing (A), and self-promotion and representation (C) consistently favoured the personal experiences, desires and feelings knowledge domain.

Web-based Finance fora, as we have demonstrated, can be used for both communicative and strategic action purposes. However, unlike other CMC environments, the structure of finance forums can facilitate manipulation through the use of multiple messages using one or more different identities, and by the very nature of the type of communication that takes place in these environments.

Conclusion

Overall, the achieving ends category (B1, B2 and B3) remained the most frequent goal orientation throughout the first 72 hours of the conversation and accounted for more than two-thirds of all linguistic acts. However there does appear to have been a shift from an emphasis on subject matter (B1) during day one to personal experiences, desires and feelings (B3) during day 3. This might suggest that participants become more reflexive over time as they attempt to make sense of conflicting information. There was a surprisingly low number of self-promotion and representation oriented posts (C1, C2 and C3) especially given the research context and the type of forum being studied. However, the pattern of linguistic acts revealed in this preliminary analysis clearly warrant further investigation using data that covers a longer period of discussion.

Information and its dissemination are central elements in the traditional view of efficient markets. Given this important theoretical nexus between market efficiency and timely access to market sensitive information, there is an urgent need to better understand the role of Internet-based finance forums in the dissemination of both false and factual market information. The analysis presented here is based on a model that links forum and market activity. The findings suggest that regulators, forum management, public companies and investors are still trying to understand that information and communication technology can facilitate greater market efficiency and at the same time provide an infrastructure particularly suited to manipulative behaviour.

The Cecez-Kecmanovic and Webb (2000) model of Communicative Practices has been shown to be a useful analytical tool for assessing the knowledge domains and goal orientation of speech acts in a web-based financial community. Web technologies are rapidly expanding and transforming social interaction and thus creating new opportunities and challenges in the use and management of speech-based virtual communities such as the finance forum example discussed in this study. Here we have advocated and briefly explored the idea of using speech act theory to model communicative practices by adopting a framework that juxtaposes goal orientation with knowledge domain. It is envisaged that this model will provide a practical methodological tool for examining digital conversations particularly where conflicting motivations and unequal power relationships may exist. In so doing, we seek to bring a new

agenda to research and critical thinking concerning the analysis of digital conversation as social process.

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