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NEW DIRECTIONS IN ONLINE COMMUNITY RESEARCH

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Panel

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Abstract

Information Systems researchers have studied multiple forms of online communities for decades. Significant progress has been made in addressing research questions such as how and when individuals are motivated to contribute knowledge in online settings. Yet, not only are important questions unanswered—such as why online communities succeed or fail—but also there still remains disagreement on the basic definition of online community. Furthermore, as the diversity of users and uses of online media continues to increase, IS researchers can now ask and answer different questions. For example, advances in social computing, mobile computing, and social media support new forms of online communities. In this panel we will propose and debate the direction of an online community research agenda for the next decade and beyond.

Keywords: Online communities, future directions, research, panel

Controversial Issues and Panelists' Positions

The panelists are drawn from a broad range of backgrounds studying multiple aspects of online communities with emphasis on different theories, methods, and phenomenon. The panel composition itself will necessarily lead to differences in opinion regarding what topics and research questions are of the most interest for future exploration in online community research. To help accentuate the distinctions among the panelists, they have each provided a brief statement regarding what types of research they would like to see more of in the future. These are as follows (listed with the moderator's statement followed by panelists in alphabetical order):

Steven L. Johnson: As moderator, my primary role on this the panel will be to facilitate discussion. In terms of the panel topic, I feel that online community research needs to move beyond the relatively simplistic views of contribution motivations to explore a full range of ways in which participants interact with online communities. I advocate more attention to research questions such as: What is the role of lurkers? What does it mean to provide leadership to an online community? Can trolls provide benefits to groups?

Brian Butler: Most existing work asks the question of why person X does activity Y in community Z without acknowledging that people, activities, and communities all exist within one or more larger social systems. We need less research that looks at the motivation of individuals in a single community and more that looks at how to describe, create, and maintain systems of nested and interrelated communities.

Samer Faraj: Much of our research has explored issues related to what motivates individuals to participate or contribute in online communities. In open source communities, research seems focused on governance issues. I believe the time is ripe for new directions in online communities research. A starting point would be to recognize that online communities are fluid (morphing and changing shape) rather than static (in the sense of steady and easily describable) entities. One should expect to see a large diversity of ebbs and flows in the life of online communities and flows of participants. Participation needs to be rethought away from the lurker-core member simple categorization and the simple measure of activities as frequency of posting. Online communities now contain knowledge generating resources such as participant time and passion, embody identity and partial social embodiment, and are evolving new and rapid ways to generate knowledge mashups or novel mixes of content and relationships. We need to understand issues surrounding the management and evolution of community boundaries, the rules and roles that are getting inscribed in the online community via the platform, and the evolution of technology affordances as online communities enact a variety of technological solutions in support of their evolving needs.

Sirkka Jarvanpaa: My research is limited to online co-creation where intellectual property rights (IPR) issues ("I/We designed it," "I/We created it") are of paramount importance. The artifacts created in the community have potentially value outside the community. We need less research that focuses on why people participate in and contribute to online communities, and more on territoriality and boundary work. How do online community ecosystems develop socially agreed on boundaries when there is little direct interaction among people? The prevailing theories on social norm development assume more intense, direct, and proximal relationships than those present in many online co-creation communities. What are the emergent processes that shape community norms for ownership of content and right over activities? How do the communities defend themselves from activities that threaten the boundaries? For example, a well-known site, mixmonsta.com, had to shut its doors because the community did not effectively defend itself. Hence, boundary work is critically important for the survival of the community.

Jerry Kane: Online communities research needs to move away from examining "traditional" types of online communities (e.g. Usenet groups) and examine how the new relational capabilities enabled by social media and Web 2.0 create both opportunities for and threats to organizing online. Such an examination would also consider whether the online community is able to accomplish its purpose or goal, rather than assuming the sustainability of the community is always a desirable goal.

Sri Kudaravalli: Online communities research needs less emphasis on "contribution" and the resulting focus on individual level characteristics, motivations and resources. Questions related to the formation and evolution of online communities as well as organizing online need more attention. For example, how is collaboration structured in online communities? How does the large-scale interplay of views and voices online unfold within and across groups? How are online communities linked to each other and how do the connections drive change?

Panel Structure

The panel structure and organization is designed to maximize interaction among participants and with the audience. The panel organizer, Steven L. Johnson, will moderate the discussion.

To promote audience participation, there will be four communication channels provided to audience members to engage with the panel:

1. Once the panel is scheduled, the panel organizer will advertise the panel online (e.g., via panelists blogs and Facebook) to solicit topics and questions that fellow online community researchers are interested in getting feedback from the panel on.

2. At the opening of the panel, note cards will be distributed to audience members that can be used to submit questions or feedback to the panel.

3. During the panel—assuming that some form of Internet connectivity is available in the presentation room—a Twitter hash tag will be announced for audience feedback. The moderator will monitor this hash tag during the presentation.

4. Finally, during the panel itself questions and comments from the audience will also be taken and interspersed with questions from the above sources.

The planned time usage for the panel is to start with no more than 10 minutes (total) allotment for a 1-2 minute introduction and opening statement by each panelist. The preponderance of the session will be spent with the moderator leading the panelists in discussion with the audience (and via questions from the other three sources). A final round of 1-2 minute conclusion statements (up to 10 minutes total) by the panelists will close the session.

Participation Statement

All of the participants have committed to attend the ICIS 2010 conference and serve on the panel.

Biographies

Steven L. Johnson is an Assistant Professor in the Management Information Systems department at Temple University Fox School of Business. He received a doctorate from the Robert H. Smith School of Business at University of Maryland, College Park in 2008. His dissertation was entitled, "Leadership impact on continued participation in online groups." As a doctoral student, he successfully guided the launch of an online community for IS doctoral students affiliated with the AOM OCIS division. At Temple University, Dr. Johnson has taught courses on business systems analysis, social media marketing and social media innovation.

Dr. Johnson has presented multiple papers on online communities including two ICIS presentations, "Preferential Attachment and Mutuality in Electronic Knowledge Networks" and ""Lurking: Legitimate or Illegitimate Peripheral Participation?" and four presentations at Academy of Management. His paper entitled "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Continued Participation Intentions in Online Communities" will be presented at AOM this August and appear in the best paper proceedings. He has also co-authored a book chapter on online communities and has a forthcoming paper in Organization Science entitled, "Network Exchange Patterns in Online Communities."

Brian S. Butler is Associate Professor of Business Administration in the Joseph M. Katz Graduate School of Business and Associate Professor of Clinical and Translational Research at University of Pittsburgh. His research interests include online communities, social computing, and mass-collaboration; power and IT; healthcare and IS; and management of complex systems for reliable organizational performance. He has taught courses in "The Business of Blogs, Online Communities, and Social Networking" and "Open Source Technologies." Dr. Butler's work has appeared in ISR, MISQ, Organization Science, JMIS, JCMC, CAIS, and Journal of Biomedical Informatics.

Dr. Butler's publications related to online communities include the seminal article appearing in ISR in 2001 on "Membership Size, Communication Activity, and Sustainability: The Internal Dynamics of Networked Social Structures." More recent publications include a J. of Medical Internet Research article on "Facebook for scientists: Requirements and services for optimizing how scientific collaborations are established"; a SIGCHI Conference on

Human Factors in Computing Systems publication entitled "Don't look now, but we've created a bureaucracy: the nature and roles of policies and rules in Wikipedia"; and CACM articles entitled, "Virtual Community Stimulation: Linking Virtual Community Drivers to Virtual Community Activities" and "The Quality of Social Ties Online." Dr. Butler also recently authored a book chapter on "Community Effort in Online Groups: Who Does the Work and Why?"

Samer Faraj holds the Canada Research Chair in Technology, Management & Healthcare at the Desautels Faculty of Management at McGill University. Previously, he was associate professor at the Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland where he was a senior Fullbright scholar at the American University of Beirut. His current research focuses on how IT transforms work and the provision of health care as well as the participation dynamics of online knowledge communities. He is currently senior editor at Organization Science and serves on the editorial board of the Journal of AIS and Information and Organization.

Dr. Faraj's 2005 MISQ article on online community participation, "Why should I share?", is ranked second on Scopus TOP CITED articles in the fields of Business, Management and Accounting (1st in information systems) for the 5 years (2005 - 2009) (http://info.scopus.com/topcited/ site visited April 26, 2009). His paper on "'It is What One Does': Why People Participate and Help Others in Electronic Communities of Practice" is the most highly cited paper (300+ Google scholar citations as of Dec 2008) of all articles in the Journal of Strategic Information Systems. Dr. Faraj has published 10 articles, 4 book chapters, and 12 conference presentations related to online communities.

Sirkka L. Jarvenpaa jointly holds an appointment at Aalto University in Helsinki, Finland and is also the James Bayless/Rauscher Pierce Refsnes Chair in Business Administration at the McCombs School of Business, University of Texas at Austin. She is the co-editor in chief of the Journal of Strategic Information Systems. She is the senior editor of Organization Science. She has served as the editor-in-chief of the Journal of Association for Information Systems and as the senior editor of Information Systems Research and MIS Quarterly. She is a frequent contributor in academic and industry forums on inter-organizational innovation, virtual teams, virtual organizations, and online communities.

Recent publications related to online communities include a forthcoming article in JMIS, "Safe Contexts for Inter-organizational Collaborations Among Homeland Security Professionals"; a forthcoming article in JIT, "Exploring Temporal Coordination of Events with Facebook.com"; and articles in Organization Science "Knowledge Collaboration among Professionals' Protecting National Security: Role of Transactive Memories in Ego-Centric Knowledge Networks" and "Coordinating Expertise Among Emergent Groups Responding to Disasters." Recent ICIS presentations include "Habit Formation in Online Communities."

Gerald C. (Jerry) Kane is an Assistant Professor of Information Systems at the Carroll School of Management at Boston College. His published research has appeared in Information Systems Research, MIS Quarterly, Organization Science, Harvard Business Review, DATABASE, Journal of Database Management, and Information & Management. He has presented research at the International Conference of Information Systems (ICIS) and at the Academy of Management (AOM) Annual Meeting. Dr. Kane received his Ph.D. in Information Systems from the Goizueta Business School of Emory University.

Dr. Kane is a recipient of a 2009 National Science Foundation CAREER Award ($500,000), "Using Social Media to Manage Knowledge." One of his primary research areas is the study of social media to manage knowledge within, between, and outside firm boundaries. His recent publications related to online communities include an article in HBR entitled, "Community Relations 2.0: With the rise of real-time social media, the rules about community outreach have changed" and a publication in MISQ, "The Shoemaker's Children: Using Wikis to Improve IS Research, Teaching, and Publication." Dr. Kane has also presented work at ICIS on "A Longitudinal Study of Perspective Development in a Fluid Online Collective," at INFORMS on "Fall From Grace: Knowledge Retention in Community-based Peer Production" and at AOM on "It's a Network, Not an Encyclopedia: A Social Network Perspective on Wikipedia Collaboration" (OCIS Division, Best Paper).

Sri Kudaravalli is an Assistant Professor in the Operations Management and Information Technology department at HEC Paris. His research interests relate to the role of information technology in distributed knowledge work, online communities and social networks. His work has been presented at several conferences where it has been nominated for or won awards and has been published in the Journal of the Association for Information Systems (JAIS). Prior to joining academia, he was an IT consultant for various organizations for nearly a decade. Dr. Kudaravalli has presented multiple conference presentations on online communities and studied online knowledge processes in his dissertation research.