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When standards is not enough to secure interoperability and competitiveness for European exporters

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RESEARCH 2.0: IMPROVING PARTICIPATION IN ONLINE RESEARCH COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Web 2.0 thinking and technologies create a number of new opportunities to conduct research broadly labeled as Research 2.0. Research 2.0 is a growing area of academic and commercial interest, which includes research undertaken in online research communities. This research in progress paper explores the practice of online research communities using a case study example operated by the commercial market research company Virtual Surveys Limited (VSL) in the UK on behalf of their client United Biscuits UK Ltd.

The preliminary findings are based on VSL and academics working together to improve the online research community participants' response rate and the quality of contributions. Data collected for this study is based on meetings, participant observation, and a pilot survey of United Biscuits online research community (snackrs.com) members.

Using the responses of 112 snackrs.com community members, a preliminary typology of motivational factors is proposed. This can be used to refine the recruitment and development of activities in an online research community. Also, a model for supporting online research communities to ensure longitudinal engagement based on an adaptation of Salmon's (2004) 5 Stage Model for e-moderation is proposed, extending the 5 stages to 7 – adding the stages of selection and disengagement

Keywords: Research 2.0, Online Research Communities, online communities

1   INTRODUCTON

In recent years there has been an exponential growth of user generated content of the web, facilitated by the emergence of the phenomenon of Web 2.0 (NetRating., 2006). The market research industry has embraced Web 2.0 tools as mechanisms for supporting their data collection activities, indeed the industry has recently started using the phrase 'Research 2.0' to cover a range of research methods utilising Web 2.0 tools and environments (Oxley, 2006). To reflect the market research profession's interest in the area, the Market Research Society conference, held in December 2007, was dedicated to Research 2.0. Three particular drivers for Research 2.0 are the observation of a) declining response rates to both online and offline surveys and polls, b) users increasingly checking and posting online reviews of products, companies and services that they interact with and c) that online research offers potential costs savings of about 40% compared to traditional survey research (Stafford and Gonier, 2007). The market research environment is changing, with users not only supplying answers but also increasingly posing questions and taking a more proactive role in shaping the areas of research (Comley, 2008). The interactivity that is demanded by users and offered by Web 2.0 tools such as discussion boards, wikis and blogs (O'Reilly, 2005) can be utilised in Research 2.0 environments to provide market researchers with an opportunity to gain richer insights and a tighter relationship with their interviewees and hence provide their clients with potentially richer data. Market research companies have used online polls for several years to collect quantitative data, but the development of bespoke online panels using community tools such as discussion forums, blogs or social networks to collect qualitative data are a more recent but rapidly expanding phenomena with in excess of 1000 bespoke research panels currently being run online (Harmon, 2005). The lead companies in this area are internationals such as the GfK Group and Communispace in the US and Virtual Surveys in the UK (Comley, 2008). Online research communities (ORCs) are typically closed communities where interaction is based on an agenda prompted by the researcher or moderator. These bespoke communities may vary in size but response rates are usually higher than the open 'naturally occurring' online communities (NOOCs). Due to the emerging nature of this type of research inevitably there are issues such as the validity of findings (Stafford and Gonier, 2007) and the consequential maintenance of such communities (Comley, 2008).

This paper reports on an interpretive investigation in collaboration with Virtual Survey Limited (VSL) on the use of Research 2.0 techniques in one online research community they run on behalf of United Biscuits UK Ltd. Specifically, the research adopts a case study approach and aims to explore the motivations behind contributor engagement within online research communities and to identify appropriate stimuli to increase long-term contributor interaction. To accomplish this aim we draw on online communities engagement literature and e-moderation models. Afterwards, we briefly outline details of the initial findings. A preliminary typology of motivational factors based on Snacks.com is proposed and discussed in relation to the literature. This typology has been created to aid understanding of the complex mix of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors that contribute to participants' rationales for engagement in online research communities. This work contributes to the management of online research communities by providing a more detailed understand of why certain members participate in such communities. It also provides guidance for online research community facilitators to assist them in supporting and encouraging those activities that increase participation in online research communities. The observations are discussed in relation to the 5 Stage Model for e-moderation (Salmon, 2004).

2   ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Naturally Occurring Online Communities (NOOCs).   When developing NOOCs there are a number of key issues to be considered. According to Wenger, a community consists of three basic elements: firstly the notion of joint enterprise, that the participants share identifiable and common goals; secondly that the participants mutually engage, that they learn and undertake activities together; and thirdly that the participants have a shared repertoire, a set of communal resources that have developed as part of their engagement (Wenger, 1998). Furthermore, trust between community members is a key enabler of community contributions (Ardichvili, Page, and Wentling, 2003). For example, contributors may hesitate to contribute out of fear of criticism, contributors may deliberately or subconsciously provide misleading contributions, they may doubt the importance of their contribution, provide inaccurate contributions or doubt that their potential contributions could be relevant to a specific discussion. Indeed, to remove identified barriers, there is a need to develop various types of trust models, for example knowledge-based or institution-based. The literature also identifies a range of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors that influence participants in NOOCs (Nov, 2007). For example, a range of reasons were identified regarding why individuals shared, or failed to share, or engaged with other members of an online community including: self-esteem boosting, altruism, conformist considerations and the moderation processes (McLure and Faraj, 2000). Moreover, others suggest that intrinsic motivators such as a feeling of belonging or the notion of meaningful contribution are much more powerful enablers than extrinsic motivators such as monetary reward (Brandtzæg and Heim, 2008; Nov, 2007). The online activity of participants in NOOCs also provides insight into the success or otherwise of the community. For example, according to Dwyer et al (2004) there are two distinct categories of online behaviour, firstly information seeking as illustrated by passive access and secondly viewing and social engagement as illustrated by participants who undertake active contribution (Dwyer, Zhang, and Hiltz, 2004). The information seeker type implies that the members are interested in updating their own knowledge in relation to a specific area of interest. Hence membership is sustained by the quality of information provided and how it is organised and presented and the speed with which it is updated. The information seeker category reaffirms that it is not sufficient to measure the success of an online community on the active members only. For example, 'lurkers', those members who read the community contributions but do not post messages, can be argued to be an important element to community success. Indeed, the approximate percentage of lurkers per online community can be as high as 90% (Mason, 1999). When considering the social engagement category, the social engagement type implies a desire to develop social engagement through the community. Therefore, supporting interpersonal relationships and encouraging social engagement can be argued to be a key objective in developing successful online communities. In fact, social engagement may directly influence contributors' satisfaction levels and the degree and quality of contact and collaboration with other community members. The role of the moderator is also shown to be critical to the success of NOOCs. For example, Ardichvili et al (2003) suggest that community moderators have to create the right conditions for content generation and dissemination. This aim can be achieved by promoting conditions for an open exchange of ideas and information, creating time and space for dialogue exchange and supporting innovative thinking. However, numerous authors question the notion of the 'managed' community arguing that Communities of Practice do not respond well to being managed "outside management efforts may throttle an otherwise thriving Community of Practice" (Ardichvili et al., 2003). Finally, there are a number of Human Computer Interaction (HCI) issues which, it is argued, affect user participation in online communities (Preece et al., 2007). Issues include contributor conceptualisation of the structure and rationale of the online environment, whether an environment is expressive or persuasive and whether an online environment adheres to various usability heuristics.

Online Research Communities (ORCs). Whilst the above literature review gives a rich insight into the key research issues for NOOCs there are key features of ORCs that differentiate them from the more traditional online communities. NOOCs tend to connect people with common interests, in ORCs

the community is closed and members are selected based on specified profiles, whilst these profiles tend to be of people with a common interest (for example frequent flyers) there are also occasions when the research dictates that the participants should be from outside of the niche. NOOCs tend to attract people who are passionate about the subject; whilst this may be the case in ORCs, the aim is to ensure that the participating body represents a broader view of users rather than only brand advocates. The nature of NOOCs means that the community is usually discovered via word of mouth or serendipity, in the case of ORCs, which are closed communities; recruitment to the community is targeted and strictly controlled. This means that NOOCs may have a much larger membership base than ORCs, although engagement in ORCs tends to be much higher. Furthermore, in NOOCs the agenda is self-evident, the community usually has a 'cause', whereas in ORCs the agenda is clearly communicated at the recruitment stage, the subject matter is usually dictated by the moderator, which frequently means that there is no shared agenda beyond answering direct questions from the moderator and therefore there are limited opportunities for the users to coalesce. Therefore, whilst in NOOCs, user interaction is usually peer-to-peer, in ORCs there is a tendency for participants to simply respond to the moderator with limited interaction between peers. This reliance on the moderator is also evident in the reluctance in ORCs, unlike NOOCs, for members to self-police; rather participants rely on the moderator to act as mediator and monitor. Furthermore, due to the 'managed' nature of ORCs where both moderators and clients are actively 'listening' and analysing responses, there is debate on whether some contributions are genuine or whether responses are tailored in an attempt to influence client decisions or attract extrinsic motivators (prizes, payments etc). Note that it is recognised that the incentive scheme has to balance the timeliness, appeal and instant gratification to the participant (Stafford and Gonier, 2007). Finally, whilst initial participant engagement within ORCs may be challenging, primarily due to the fact that the recruited participants may not be as familiar with Reseach 2.0 tools as those who engage in NOOCs, the evidence suggests that levels of engagement in ORCs are typically much higher than NOOCs (proportion of NOOC forum members who engage <5%, proportion of ORC members who engage 50-70% (Comley, 2008)). A summary of the main differences between the ORCs and NOOCs is presented in table 1.

	NOOC	ORC
Community initiator	Emergent – member lead	Client organisation driven – research agenda driven
Moderator role	Policing and support	Research directing, steering and probing as well as policing and support. Data analysis and interpretation.
Participant to participant interaction	High	Medium to low
Membership selection	Usually self selecting	Usually selected

Table 1: A summary of the differences between NOOCs and ORCs

2.1 Longitudinal Participation in Online Research Communities

In order to develop a model for supporting ORCs to ensure longitudinal engagement, this research has used Salmon's 5 Stage Model for e-moderation as a foundation. The 5 Stage Model offers practical advice on the use of online communication (Chowcat, 2005; Moule, 2007). This model is based on several years of action research on online conferencing in the Open University UK (Salmon, 2004). Whilst this model was developed with learning communities in mind, it has since been used in a number of other ways to structure online communication processes (Lynch, Heinze, and Scott, 2009). We therefore feel that the model offers a starting point in discussing online research communities.

This model of online community building and facilitation describes a five-stage process mapping the different stages of engaging participants using online communication technology. In the figure demonstrating the model, the level of engagement is indicated by the interactivity column (far right hand side) and the darkness of the colour. For example, stage 4 "Knowledge Construction" is the most interactive of all the stages, this is indicated by the black colour (the amount of interactivity measure on the interactivity column). The development starts from stage 1 "Access and motivation" and progresses up to stage 5 "Development" indicated by the arrowed "learning" line on the left hand side of the model. Each of the stages is subdivided into two triangles representing the roles of the e-moderator and the technical support staff. These roles vary at each stage.

The first stage of the 5 Stage Model is concerned with accessing the system, when participants are issued with access information by the technical support and welcomed by the e-moderator. The second stage focuses on online socialisation of the participants in the community; they are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the environment and socialise with others. The information exchange stage puts more emphasis on interaction and engages participants with the materials. The final two stages are where the participants should already be familiar with their environment and thus are able to proceed with knowledge construction and development. The model is based on a sequential principle that there are certain steps that have to be mastered before higher-level steps can be undertaken. The underlying principle is to use activities to make participants interact with each other and the e-moderator, rather than simply and passively accessing information such as handouts and presentation material. The model assumes that the participants will need to learn how to use the system's technology and functionality over time.

This 5 Stage Model has resonance with theories about group work, particularly, the working stages such as 'forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning' (Tuckman and Jensen, 1977). These similarities are particularly visible in the interactivity scale of the 5 Stage Model. The 5 Stage Model indicates that the interactivity is reduced at the final stage as is the case with group working stages of Tuckman and Jensen. The purpose of the 5 Stage Model is to address online communication and group work within the constructivist pedagogy (Salmon, 2004). This highlights some of the main benefits of the model such as simplicity (Moule, 2007), grounded in practice, reflects constructivist pedagogy, clarity, and provision of a good navigation tool for facilitators (Chowcat, 2005). However, there are also some disadvantages in the 5 Stage Model, such as the exclusion of other pedagogies and e-learning approaches (Moule, 2007). The model prescribes a course structure, ignores rhythms of participation, isolates e-learning from other learning and finally it is not a model for e-learning per se (Chowcat, 2005), which is an advantage for our investigation into ORCs

3   INTERPRETIVE CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN

The research presented in this paper adopts an interpretive stance. Using an interpretive case study approach (Oates, 2006; Walsham, 2006; Yin, 1994), the research aims to explore the motivations behind contributor engagement within online research communities and to identify appropriate stimuli to increase long-term contributor interaction. The researchers involved in the study area are the authors and members of Virtual Surveys Ltd management team who include individuals with over 25 years experience of running market research studies in commercial settings. The academic researchers are experienced in the field of information systems development, knowledge management, online community moderation and are from an Information Systems background.

The ORC being studied is managed by Virtual Surveys Ltd (VSL) on behalf of United Biscuits UK Ltd (UB). There are two other communities examined in this research, but for the benefit of richness of discussion only the UB community will be described to discuss the preliminary analysis – that is the snackrs.com community. Guided by Myers' (1997) assertion that interpretive research should present multiple viewpoints of those involved and their different perspectives, the communities were observed over a six-week period and the observations and interpretations made by the researchers were presented back to VSL management for potential improvements to be discussed and incorporated back

into subsequent data collection scenarios. The researchers were actively involved in community membership and were able to create their own posts and reply to other community members. This allowed first hand experience of interaction in the community and provided the researchers with the same level of exposure to email prompts and alerts as any other community member would experience. The presence of the researchers made any major impact on the community members, as members are already accustomed to being observed by a) the actual marker research company and b) by the client company stakeholders such as UB.

Since the communities are operated by a commercial market research organisation, this research is undertaken under their strict in-house ethical approval guidelines. Before the start of this research, approval was also gained from stakeholders within the individual online research community client organisations such as United Biscuits. The reconcilliation of commercial and academic interests has at times posed certain challenges that impact on the richness of the data reported, for example we are not able to report exact community member numbers. However, collaboration with a market research company also has its benefits such as the ability to use cutting edge market research technology and being allowed access to professional market researchers; for example VSL facilitated the online survey design and creation.

3.1   The United Biscuit Community

The United Biscuits community has approximately 1000 (c. 700 female, c. 300 male) members. Each online research community employs a range of Research 2.0 functionalities including voting polls, discussion forums, virtual focus groups, blog environments and functionality to allow community members to upload personal details, photos, videos and create friendship networks (see Figure 1 for a screenshot example). Each community has a dedicated moderator who posts email requests to members to contribute to the ORC on a specific topic of interest to the client on approximately a twice-weekly basis. The participants are not offered monetary reward for engaging with the online research communities however all respondents in the United Biscuit community are are offered free snacks and gain additional rewards based on 'quality' discussion forum contributions. VSL typically release a market research survey and then supply responses to the client within a one-week period. Responses to query requests sent by email to the ORC typically start within minutes of posting a notification of a new query to participants, peak within 24 hours, with no significant additional responses after a one-week period. As is demonstrated by the speed of responses within these commercial ORCs, the volume of data generated within a short period of time means that a longitudinal study was not a prerequisite for gaining a meaningful dataset. Response rates on given topics are on average 2% of the total community with approximately 10 to 45 responses per request. One of the issues of community management is that the majority of community memberships are inactive - for example in snackrs.com over 500 users have not posted a single contribution. Figure 1 is a screen shot taken from the snackrs.com online research forum. This screen shot illustrates that the community website has a conventional navigation bar on the left hand side of the web page and some high level navigation items at the top and bottom. The discussion forums are listed by topics and participants are given some high level information on the number of new topics, number of posts and when the last post was added.
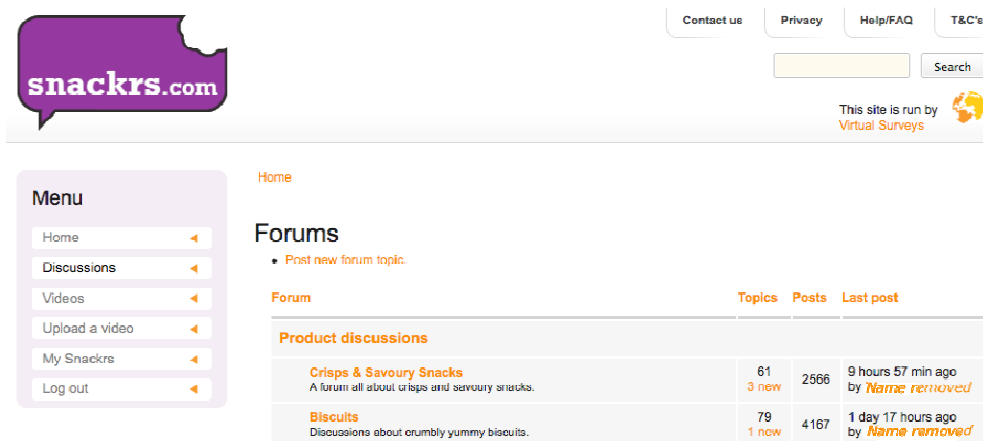
Figure 1: Screenshot of United Biscuits online research community – snackrs.com

In order to undertake this research study, data was sourced from a number of locations and stakeholders. The data sources influence decisions on potential online research community improvements. This provides an incremental improvement to the community that is continuously studied and reviewed by the research team. The decisions on implementation of any issues rest with the staff of VSL. The initial reflections, which are reported in this research in progress paper, are based on the two academic authors of this paper becoming participants in the research communities for a six-week period. The findings were discussed with the VSL staff and community improvements were initiated. A detailed discussion of these findings is the subject of this research in progress paper. At the beginning of this research a snapshot of all the communities was made which tracks all members, their profiles and number of posts to the community. The data collection and analysis is based on seven stages, extending the 5 Stage Model to include 'Selection Stage' and 'Disengagement Stage'. The 'Selection Stage' was used to probe if there are any particular variables that determined individuals' activities in the community. The 'Disengagement Stage' was included to determine any common variables that might have contributed to community members withdrawing.

4   PRELIMINARY DATA DISCUSSION

4.1   United Biscuits Community Typology

In order to improve the levels of engagement, it was perceived as important to identify the motivators for community members to take part in the community. Therefore, the first stage of the research consisted of a detailed analysis of the responses provided by 112 members of the United Biscuits community (known as snackrs.com) in response to the question 'What are the best things about being a member of this community?' Because qualitative data analysis is an open and iterative process, categorisation resulted in the emergence or induction of a rich categorisation as the categories were 'extended', 'filled in', 'bridged' and 'surfaced' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The initial analysis of the responses to the above question indicated that the rationale for participant interaction in the online research communities could be subdivided into seven motivational factors, of concern is the limited number of quotes that appear to suggest that participants are seeking social engagement. Examples of responses against typology type are presented in table 2. Note that some participants provided several responses. This means that someone can be classified as, for example, both information seeker and social engagement seeker at the same time. The typology is provisional and the types will be further refined as the research progresses. A summary of the types analysis and their potential tendencies as identified in the literature is provided in table 3. It is important to note that these are ideal case scenarios and there may be situations that will not conform to these tendencies.

Nr	Type	Quote examples
1	Social engagement seekers	"Seeing other people's options and being able to view your own" "getting involved in discussions - being able to see what other peoples' opinions are and giving my own" "feeling like we have some input" "Its great to share the experience with other snackrs"
2	Power seekers	"Being part of a community that is influential" "you feel your opinion counts for something" "knowing my comments are read by someone who actually wants to know"
3	Freebie seekers	"you get to know about great biscuits and treats" "receiving the snacks!" "the free samples are nice"
4	Information seekers	"The chance to hear of new snacks and being chosen to try them" "Finding out about new products and sampling them" "receiving e-mails about new products, keeping informed, so I can purchase items that I know are nice and have tried them first"
5	Hobbyists	"The site is fun to visit and about my favourite subject - food!" "thinking about food and whetting my appetite - time to reflect"
6	Information hungry	"Finding out about the new snacks being developed first, and of course getting the chance to try them out! I also enjoyed choosing the packaging and name for the Christmas biscuits" "Getting insider information on new products, the chance to give some feedback and, of course, the free trials!"
7	Geeks	"The layout of the website" "The polls, the surveys & the opportunities to test new products" "This is the most interesting website I am a member of"

Table 2: Preliminary typology of motivational factors based on Snacks.com

As we can see from this preliminary analysis there is a complex mix of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors that contribute to participants' engaging in online research communities. The typology does not suggest that one member will fit necessarily into a single one of the motivational types, for example some statements of members included several reasons that they felt were their motivators to participate in the online community activities. Yet there were also some individuals who only identified one reason for participation. Since these types are based on individual member's contributions it is not possible for them to place the entire community into one type, however, the more members of a community that subscribe to one particular motivator, the more this motivator could be used as the main source of activities generation and community management. For example, if the majority of snackrs.com identify with "Freebie seekers" this would mean that the product samples are important to them and stopping this activity could reduce their engagement in the community, on the other hand if samples were sent more frequently they might be tempted to participate more.

4.2 Tendencies of motivational factors

The preliminary typology is further explored in Table 3 in relation to the literature in order to provide insight into the reasons behind participants' engagement in these communities. The first identified type is the Social Engagement Seeker, these individuals are characterised by comments that indicate interest in interaction with other ORC members. For example, these people might be there because they want to see what others have to say and how they can interact with those interested in a common topic. These individuals highlight the community elements of joint enterprise and collaboration as proposed by Wenger (1998). They are stimulated by intrinsic motivators which contribute to their feelings of belonging to a community, such participant types are more likely to trust others in the community and are likely to be active participants (McLure and Faraj, 2000). Considering the 5 stage model of engagement, this participant type will require minimal support at the initial access stage. They are predisposed to socialise, however the quality of the information provision and critical

reflection as they move to the knowledge construction and development stages may need significant moderator support in order to ensure that a valuable contribution from them is achieved.

Nr	Type	Community elements (Wenger, 1998)	Trust between community membership (Ardichvili et al., 2003)	Motivators (Osterloh and Frey, 2000)	Participation (Dwyer et al., 2004)
1	Social engagement seekers	Yes	Yes	Intrinsic	Active
2	Power seekers	Not	Not	Intrinsic	Active
3	Freebie seekers	Not	Not	Extrinsic	Passive
4	Information seekers	No	Yes	Intrinsic	Passive
5	Hobbyists	Yes	Yes	Intrinsic	Active
6	Information hungry	No	Yes	Intrinsic	Active
7	Geeks	No	Yes	Intrinsic	Passive

Table 3: Tendencies of the motivational factors

The second identified type is the Power Seeker, these individuals are characterised by comments indicating a desire to have some influence, usually with the ORC sponsor (e.g. UB). These participants may have a very specific reason for engagement in the community. These individuals have a limited sense of community and, when considering the 5 stage model of engagement, whilst providing detailed knowledge, constructive dialogue may be so topic focused that their contribution to the collection of wider research data may be limited, effectively there may be a need to find mechanisms to move them back to the early socialisation stage of the model if their contributions cease to be useful or of benefit to the development of the wider community.

The third identified type is the Freebie Seeker, these individuals were motivated to join the ORC in order to gain the extrinsic rewards on offer. Logically, the expectation was that the snackrs.com community would have the highest proportion of non-contributing freebie seekers as in this community all registered members of the community were provided with occasional free samples regardless of their level of engagement in the community. However, this community has a low proportion of non-contributing members. As this research progresses, further investigation will be undertaken regarding whether the free samples act as a stimuli for engagement in the community. Considering the 5 stage model, snackrs.com members were also active in terms of knowledge construction and development – there was a great tendency to interact and debate with community development activities occurring, for example a lively informal competition concerned with posting photographs of Halloween activities. This activity was only very loosely related to the research issue (Halloween packaged sweets) yet stimulated co-construction of participant views on the subject. For future work there is a clear need to more fully understand the influence of extrinsic motivators on ORC contributions.

The fourth and sixth identified types are concerned with information gathering – the Information Seeker and the Information Hungry, these individuals are characterised by comments indicating a desire to learn and gain new information. The differentiating factor between the two types is that the Information Hungry specifically want to gain some form of 'edge' so that they aware of new developments first. As with Power Seekers, these individuals tended to have limited sense of community and, when considering the 5 stage model of engagement, whilst they may make some attempts at socialising, they tend to move to simple poll responses rather than towards generating useful co-constructed knowledge. Mechanisms need to be established to ensure that they are drawn into socialising and ultimately moved towards community development.

The fifth identified type is the Hobbyists, these individuals are characterised by having a genuine commitment to the ORC topic area and may make ideal participants. The danger is that they become overbearing within the community, consider for example the participant in snackrs.com who had made 243 posts. When considering this participant type against the 5 stage model of engagement the challenge is to ensure that these types become pivotal members rather than bland information providers, their contribution needs to encourage rather than overwhelm other participants. Finally, the seventh identified type is the Geek, these individuals are characterised by having an interest in the technology rather than the topic. Close attention needs to be maintained on their contribution, for example geeks are interested in the technological use of the forum and how it advances their abilities to interact online with other members. For example, the opportunity to upload their own photographs and video content created a technological challenge that some members appeared to enjoy.

4.3   Relevance of the 5 stage model to ORCs

The 5 stage model was developed for educational settings where students are primarily motivated by gaining knowledge and understanding, the moderators role is primarily to assess students' activities and facilitate their knowledge development. This is a major differentiator with market research communities, where, as identified in our motivational typology above, the motivators for the community members vary. This leads us to re-consider the 5 stages of the model proposed by Salmon (2004). A stage which is not within the control of the educators, but is of primary concern for a commercial online research community, is the motivating factors that influence members' enrolment in such communities. For example, if a member is displaying "Freebie seeker" characteristics does the community benefit from their presence? Although we are aware that several factors might influence an individual's contribution and participation, a stage of member selection needs to be added to the existing 5 stage model. This stage would appear before the access and motivation stage and would comprise "Screening" the participants and their intentions. Also, it would be beneficial to highlight the key values of communities at the second stage of the model such as the "Access and Motivation" stage. Practically, this could be implemented by providing a simplified terms and conditions of the site use that highlights the need for expected interaction levels.

Another stage which was not necessarily applicable to the 5 stage model is where participants withdraw their participation. Other processes in educational settings would manage this stage, however, in ORCs it is not practical and could be done much more easily with an exit survey so that data could be captured to establish any trends regarding why members are leaving. This can feed into the recruitment and community management process to identify trends and patterns of members disengaging because perhaps their initial rationale for engaging in the online research community was not being satisfied. This leaves us with an expansion of the five stage model to seven stages, one prior to the engagement "Screening" and one after the community engagement has failed and a member withdraws - this could be referred to as "Disengagement". Although these stages are already in place in practice in ORCs, the online research community creators tend to focus on the selection of correct sample groups rather than necessarily considering their motivational factors, which we feel are as important to the members' existence as fitting the right market research segment or participant profile.

Based on our observations, the current interaction of community members tends to be centred around the third stage of the original 5 stage model of "Information giving and receiving". There is little social interaction between members and where interaction happens, it is primarily between moderators and members, where moderators are trying to clarify the findings for the research brief. Having said that, there are special activities that are designed to be "fun" and to bond community members, but these are not as popular with participants as some research focused discussions. The ideal stage of "Knowledge construction and development", where participants take over the initiative for product development say by initiating a new biscuit design or packaging for existing biscuits, does not happen in the studied community. This, to some extent, questions the notion of the Web 2.0 phenomena – the technology is there for members to take over the initiative, but they are not stepping over the barrier

and tend to be more driven by the prompts of moderators and their research agenda. This requires further investigations.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current research-in-progress paper has outlined the initial findings of our research study. At this stage it is not possible to recommend firm action in order to improve the engagement of online research community members. However, we are able to provide a preliminary typology based on users' beliefs. This can be used for by VSL for identification of future online community member types, recruitment, development of incentives and interfaces to suit certain kinds of behaviour. For example, to encourage 'Social Engagement Seeker' type of behaviour, more 'fun' activities could perhaps be introduced to facilitate community building and not necessarily focus on the core community purpose. This would allow members to get to know each other and allow those who entered the community at a later stage to catch up and see the "human side of interaction".

The research to date has begun to suggest a profile of an 'idealised' ORC participant who would: exhibit community elements, trust the community, have intrinsic motivators and be an active participant. Those individuals who would fit this ideal profile are 'Social Engagement Seekers' and 'Hobbyists'. However, there are drawbacks to such idealised participants. For example, the 'Social Engagement Seeker' is primarily motivated by interactions with others hence they could potentially contribute too many off-topic conversations that may not necessarily be of interest to the client. On the other hand the participants who are less engaged in online research communities are those that exhibit no community membership, have no trust in community, are motivated by extrinsic rewards and are passive, for example the 'Freebie Seeker'. Arguably, there is a need for only active members of the community, who contribute to the discussions, however, those that answer polls and surveys are important to the research company when they are trying to establish a view on a specific topic that can be generalised.

The above conclusions contribute primarily to the online research communities' moderation literature and secondarily to the moderation of general online communities. The preliminary typology requires further refinement and this is a research direction that we are taking, however, other studies in other communities would benefit this process and allow us to better understand the moderation of online communities. We feel that the 5 Stage e-moderation model is a useful guiding point for the discussion of all online research communities and not only those in educational settings where they were initially developed. However, unlike in educational settings, participants cannot be selected by the educators, in market research settings the participant selection and retention process is crucial and we propose to add these additional "Screening" and "Disengagement" stages to the 5 stage model – making it a seven stage model for online market research communities.

Future work will be based on face-to-face interviews with senior VSL management, online research community system developers and the online research community moderators who are VSL employees. The community members' views will also be elicited through an online survey created specifically to stimulate discussion on community improvement. Additionally, telephone interviews with a sample of participant community members will be undertaken. Google analytics data (for example times of website access, frequency of contribution, pages viewed, length of engagement on the page) will also be used to provide quantitative data on general participants' engagement patterns. Finally, participant profiles will be further reviewed.

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