Social Media and Communities Minitrack

Dan Suthers
University of Hawai'i at Manoa
suthers@hawaii.edu

Karine Nahon
Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya and
University of Washington
karineb@uw.edu

The Social Media and Communities mini-track focuses on the interrelationship between social media of all types and communities in the context of work, personal life, education and society. "Communities" is taken in a broad sense, including communities of practice, epistemic communities, or communities of inquiry, and may include both fully virtual communities and social media use that supports or complements geographically based or "offline" communities. In general, the mini-track seeks papers that advance our understanding of social network growth, formation, structure and outcomes through social media, explore how socio-technical affordances relate to social media use and outcomes, evaluate design of social media technologies and practices for effective community development and maintenance, and develop theories, models and principles of social media design, use and outcomes. This year the submissions exhibited a greater emphasis on the relationship between individual behavior and social media communities than in the past. The papers were grouped into two sessions based on similarity of topics and methods.

The first two papers use interviews and content analysis to provide us with insight into the character of three specific online communities, as reflected in the experiences of members or sustained by their practices. In "*'They are like personalized mini-Googles': Seeking Information on Facebook Groups*", Mudliar and Raval present a qualitative study of information seeking in two Q&A Facebook groups primarily consisting of residents of Bangalore, India. Members of both groups valued the social support (both direct and via archives) these groups offered for information seeking. Both groups were "hyper-local", being "deeply entangled with social and physical geographies", but in different ways: one was localized geographically on living in Bangalore, while the other localized culturally in (for example) practices of child rearing, married life, and linguistic identity associated with Bangalore. The paper also discusses platform affiances that support information search in Facebook groups. In "*Knowledge*

Production and Social Roles in an Online Community of Emerging Occupation: A Study of User Experience Practitioners on Reddit", Kou, Gray, Toombs and Adams report a study of how the "/r/userexperience" subreddit (forum) helps participants become user experience (UX) professionals, focusing particularly on the roles actors play in knowledge production and dissemination. A grounded theory approach is taken to analyze the content of the contributions of top participants, resulting in the identification of five roles (knowledge broker, translator, experienced practitioner, conversation facilitator, and learner). These roles are then theorized as to how they interact to form a community of practice, and their implications for design education.

In the third paper, "*Photographic Disclosure in Facebook and Relational Closeness with Others*", the emphasis shifts decidedly to individuals in the context of the social. Houghton, Joinson, Caldwell, Marder and Collins examine the relationship between sharing of different types of photographic depictions and perceived relational closeness. Participants were recruited into five independent survey groups defined by five types of relationship. Participants assessed their relational closeness to someone in the given type of relationship, and provided information about the frequency with which this person shared seven different kinds of photographs. A MANOVA model found that "perceived sharing frequency is related both positively and negatively to relational closeness dependent on the photographic content and relationship type", pointing to the relevance of photograph sharing for maintaining relationships.

The fourth paper, "*Polarization on social media: when group dynamics leads to societal divides*" by Rychwalska and Roszczyńska-Kurasińska, takes the collective as the unit of analysis. Micro-level rules model how social influence (being influenced by one's associates) is affected by confidence in one's opinion, reactance against group opinion to maintain freedom of choice, and rewiring of social connections to those with similar opinions. An agent-based

HICSS

simulation then tests hypotheses at the macro level of the social system to explore how individual decisions might lead to polarization in societies. Authors find that confidence (due to social desirability and action commitment) and rewiring of social connections lead to more complete segregation of opinions over a larger range of issues. Reactance can lead to more extreme opinions; however, the relationship is more complex between reactance and rewiring. Authors discuss how polarization that occurs naturally may be amplified by social media designs.

The papers in the second session use structural equation modeling of survey data to examine how perceptions and beliefs affect intentions to act in communities. "*The Buffer Effect of Receiving Social Support on SNS Exhaustion and SNS Satisfaction: An Exploratory Study of the Lonely and Emotionally Unstable*", by Lo, Guo and Bradley, is concerned with sentiments of satisfaction with versus exhaustion from overuse of social networking sites, which may affect intention to continue use. Motivated by the social support literature in medicine, the authors hypothesize that receiving social support will increase satisfaction and reduce exhaustion for most users, while social overload (providing social support to others out of a sense of duty) will have the opposite effects, but results may differ for those users who are lonely or emotionally unstable. Hypotheses concerning receiving social support are confirmed, but not those concerning social overload. In fact, social overload (as defined above) is associated with higher satisfaction in those who are emotionally unstable.

Live streaming is a new business activity in which streamers broadcast videos of themselves engaged in a variety of activities, such as gaming, while others watch and interact with each other and may make financial contributions to the streamer. In "*Will You "Tip" Celebrated Streamers? Sense of Virtual Community and the Moderating Role of Subjective Happiness*", Hsieh, Ou and Xu are concerned with how participants' sense of participating in a virtual community (operationalized with four components), influences their intention to tip. Results show that three of components: sense of membership, emotional connection, and having influence, are positively related with tipping intention. Also, subjective happiness has a positive moderating effect on the impact of need fulfillment.

The last two papers are both concerned with brand communities, and have some overlap in the constructs of their structural equation models.

"*Drivers of Online Brand Community Value Creation: The Role of Psychological Empowerment*" focuses on psychological empowerment in brand communities related to toys, video games, online games, sportswear, motorbikes, and coffee. Hsieh, Tseng, and Lee propose that perceived responsiveness, validation and status seeking along with network size and information quality will positively impact psychological empowerment, which will lead to advocacy, helping others and providing feedback in the community. Most pathways were significant, with status seeking and validation being the main drivers. The final paper, "*How does social media interactivity affect brand loyalty?*", by Huang, Liao, Wang and Lin, studies brand communities related to basketball teams in Taiwan. They conceptualize interactivity as including responsiveness, social influence, and media richness, and examine how the latter two influence brand loyalty directly, as well as all three indirectly through the perceived community benefits of knowledge gains and sense of membership. The paths from media richness and sense of membership to brand loyalty were positive and significant. Some of the indirect paths were also significant, but not always with the expected polarity. For example, knowledge gains were influenced positively by social influence and responsiveness, but in turn negatively related to brand loyalty. Practical implications are discussed in both papers.

This collection of papers reflects the diversity of social media and community studies, albeit with a change of emphasis. Previously we saw more analyses that operated primarily at the community level (e.g., using social network analysis). We continue to see research that bridges between individual participants and the collective entity as units of analysis. For example, the first two papers capture the nature of online communities through interviews seeking the experiences of individuals, and the fourth uses a formal model of individual behavior to derive group behavior through simulation. However, there is a trend in this collection towards research that focuses on individual or pairwise units of analysis without direct modeling of collective phenomena. The community becomes the context rather than object of study. This trend is exemplified by the third paper of the first session and the entire second session. Finally, HICSS, whether by accident or design, has an emphasis on business contexts, so it is appropriate that this mini-track serve as a locus of contact between researchers working in business related areas and research more typical of the social media conferences.