

SOCIALIZATION IN OPEN ONLINE COMMUNITIES OF PRODUCTION AND EXCHANGE

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PHENOMENON

My research focuses on the socialization of newcomers in open online communities of production and exchange. Examples of such communities include citizen science projects like Zooniverse, collaboratively written encyclopedias like Wikipedia, and local exchange sites like the bartering platform Ourgoods. Such open communities are reliant on contributors having a shared understanding of the norms of participation (Benkler, 2004), however, newcomer socialization in open online communities is not supported by formal processes (Farzan, Kraut, Pal, & Konstan, 2012); thus newcomers must proactively engage a range of sociotechnical resources in order to orient themselves towards the norms of practice.

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RESEARCH FOCUS

- How do newcomers in open online communities construct a personal understanding of how to participate?
- How do newcomers establish relationships with other participants or technological resources as they work towards making sense of their new surroundings?
- How do variations in the design of such platforms constrain or enable the relationships newcomers establish with social and technical resources?
- How do features that highlight activities in online communities represent and perpetuate normative practice (Kiesler, Kraut, Resnick, & Kittur, 2011; Lampinen, Lehtinen, Cheshire, & Suhonen, 2013)?
- How do features provide access to explicit descriptions of normative practice (Bryant, Forte, & Bruckman, 2005; Kraut, Burke, Riedl, & Resnick, 2011)?

METHODOLOGY

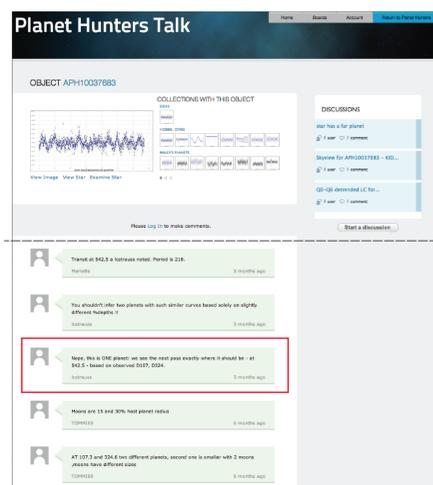
- Qualitative methodologies: individual and group interviews with newcomers, experienced members, and community managers, diary studies with newcomers, and participant observation where I collect traces of participation in social spaces and traces of activity found in system logs.
- Quantitative methodologies: I plan to experiment with the design of platform to test impact on socialization. I also plan to conduct surveys of newcomer interaction with social and technical resources and social network analysis of newcomer interaction with site features and other users.

CURRENT WORK

- Research assistant on SoCS grant exploring learning and motivation in citizen science projects. I focus on how the sociotechnical components of various citizen science projects on Zooniverse.org support the orientation of newcomers.
- Using the Theory of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and Erickson and Kellogg's (2000) concept of social translucence, our team has coined the term practice proxies in order to describe how traces of conversations in the project forums act as proxies that represent the normative practice of participants.
- We are investigating different types of practice proxies, the technical features that support access to such proxies, and how new users engage the proxies as a means of orienting themselves towards the norms of practice

FUTURE WORK

- Pursue the questions described in my research focus and current work across a range of open online communities. In particular I want to conduct pilot studies with newcomers to Ourgoods.org, a bartering site for artists in New York City, and newcomers to Wikipedia. Answering such questions will provide a valuable comparative analysis of the sociotechnical components that support informal socialization across various types of open online communities.



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