

Mini Track: “Online Communities in the Digital Economy”

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Some years ago, Online Communities were considered one of the most promising innovations resulting from the Internet revolution. Community building and community development were proclaimed to be a key success factor for the digital enterprise. As a result, Internet ventures tried to artificially build and foster Online Communities in different forms – as part of online shops, portal sites or B2B platforms, or as design, relationship or gaming communities. At the same time research was mainly related to topics as for example how to build a community and how to gain critical mass and market shares as soon as possible.

Today, findings show that in many cases Online Communities did not meet the expectations of their operators. Only a few Online Communities are financially sustainable, many disappeared and in many cases companies could not get the promised gains out of their online ventures. Consequently, the most important research questions concerning Online Communities are related to the investigation of factors for success or failure (financially as well as socially) by means of longitudinal studies. A related and lately emerging research area considers new forms of Online Communities – the so called Mobile Communities.

This minitrack comprises a series of papers that study success and failure of Online Communities and their respective business models. The papers provide longitudinal studies, discussion of social aspects, case studies, and address critical aspects of community building.

The first session of this minitrack comprises three papers, which are based on case studies of specific online communities. The first paper by Jan Marco Leimeister, Pascal Sidiras, and Helmut Krcmar presents an empirical study of success factors of virtual communities from the perspective of members and operators. The second paper by Calvin M. L. Chan, Mamata Bhandar, Lih-Bin Oh, and Hock-Chuan Chan discusses a case study about recognition and participation in a virtual community. The third paper by Ulrika Josefsson explores individuals’ sense-making processes involved in the initiation of online community building.

The second session also comprises three papers. Blair Nonnecke, Jenny Preece, and Dorine Andrews conducted a study on what lurkers and posters think of each other. The second paper by Andrew Cox and Anne Morris discusses information dynamics and discourse in a distributed professional community. Johann Füller, Michael Bartl, Holger Ernst, and Hans Mühlbacher discuss the specific potential of Online Communities to stimulate innovation.

The third session starts with two papers on gaming communities. Helena Holmström looks at virtual communities for software maintenance. Mark Ginsburg and Suzanne Weisband conducted an empirical study on volunteerism and support of member subgroups for a specific platform – the Internet Chess Club (ICC). The third paper by Mark Heitmann, Catja Prykop, and Peter Aschmoneit discusses the use of means-end chains for the management of mobile brand communities. The final paper by Aldo de Moor and Willem-Jan van den Heuvel looks at an emerging technical solution – Web Services – for the support of virtual communities.