

## Online Communities in the Digital Economy

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Online Communities were considered one of the most important innovations resulting from the Internet revolution. Community building and community development, i.e., community management were proclaimed as a key success factor in the digital economy differentiating business models in the digital economy from traditional ones.

As a result online communities emerged in different forms –as part of online shops, as portal sites, as part of B2B platforms, or as design, relationship or game 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 expectations. Only few online communities are financially sustainable, many disappeared and in many cases companies could not get the promised gains out of online communities. Consequently, the most important research questions concerning online communities are related to investigation of online communities through longitudinal studies and to questions how to build sustainable online communities providing financial success and other benefits to companies and customers. A related and newly emerging research area considers new forms of online communities – the so called mobile communities.

This minitrack comprises a series of papers that align with the shifted emphasize of research related to online communities. The papers provide longitudinal studies and case studies of communities, address critical aspects of community building such as personalization and trust, provide design directions for new types of communities as mobile and implicit communities and propose new methods for assessment of the needs of community members.

The first session of this minitrack comprises four papers, which are based on case studies of specific online communities and provide general design directions for communities. The first paper by Petra Schubert and Michel Koch discusses the potentials of personalization on Virtual Community platforms. The paper describes the research design of two empirical platform projects for students, one of them carried out in Germany, the other one in German-speaking Switzerland.

The second paper by Marco Leimeister, Miriam Daum and Helmut Krcmar studies a particular kind of mobile community, namely communities in the field of health care and cancer treatment.

The third paper on Product Development in Virtual Communities by Franz, Reinhard and Thomas Wolkinger is dedicated to one particularly innovative function of online communities, the product and service development.

The fourth paper by Paul Pavlou, Yao-Hua Tan and David Gefken, studies trust as one prerequisite of online transactions in virtual communities and in particular in the field of inter-organizational systems.

The second session comprises three papers. Edna Reid's paper entitled "Identifying a Company's Non-Customer Online Communities A Prototypology" discusses marketing issues as well as the role of virtual communities in marketing, and provides guidelines to how to identify implicit communities in or among? companies.

The second paper of Thomas Schoberth, Jennifer Preece and Armin Heinzl studies long-term communication activities in a virtual community of stock traders.

The third paper of the second session explores consumers cognition towards online communities. It is authored by Peter Aschmoneit und Mark Heitmann.