

▼ Introduction to Virtual Communities Minitrack

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Virtual Communities have been studied from a variety of perspectives. Examples range from communities of interest to communities of practice, from gaming to transaction communities. More specifically, community building and community management may be factors of key success in the digital economy and may represent new business models in the digital economy, as well as being new venues of social interactions and social relationships.

Online communities differ in their orientations and platforms. Nevertheless, there are common features which all types of communities share: group interests, joint practices, collective ontologies with common semantics as well as normative issues. Communities are a sociological phenomenon. They can foster a social atmosphere for interactions and transactions.

The online mini-track has accepted three papers that deal with various aspects of virtual communities and using various methodologies and style. The first paper, "Leveraging A Wiki To Enhance Virtual Collaboration In The Emergency Domain," authored by Connie White, Linda Plotnick, Ronja Addams Moring, Murray Turoff and Roxanne Hilts, analyze the role wiki may have in crisis situations. The paper also included features and functionality, which are important for safety-critical work, should add a minimum of bureaucratic overhead while helping to establish trust and a sense of purpose and community among the users, thus easing the evaluation of information reliability while strengthening ad hoc group interaction.

The second paper, "Virtual Teams and Development: A Language Games Perspective," authored by Sajda Qureshi and Anne-Laure Fayard, investigates discourse in virtual teams comprised of international civil servants who interact online to negotiate terms on an agreement concerning terrorism. The contribution of this paper lies in the identification of the language games that take place in virtual teams and how these enable aspects of development to be addressed.

The third paper, "Social Network Structure as a Critical Success Condition for Virtual Communities," authored by David Hinds and Ronald M. Lee, examines conditions which lead to virtual communities' success in an open source context. The hypotheses, which are based on social network theory and related research, suggest that success is supported by high levels of affiliation with other communities, moderate levels of density within the network of community conversations, moderate levels of density in the communications between peripheral members and core members, and low levels of density in the communications between administrators and the rest of the community.

Finally, the fourth paper, "Influence of Sense of Presence on Users' Intention to Participate in a Virtual Community," written by Yoonhyuk Jung and Boryung Ju, addresses the question of the design of advanced interfaces (e.g., 3D) to encourage participation in virtual communities and support social interaction.