Introduction to HICCS-48 Social Networking and Communities Minitrack

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The Social Networking & Communities minitrack focuses on questions of community building and management as mediated by social media and networking platforms. By ‘communities’, we include communities of practice, epistemic communities, communities of inquiry; as well as fully virtual communities, and social media use that supports or complements geographically based community. We called for research, theory, practice, or policy papers that address the way social media support communities for business, political, social, learning and gaming initiatives and outcomes.

The minitrack has been ongoing since 2003 under various titles. Since 2014, we have joined the newly formed Digital & Social Media Track. This year, the minitrack comprises eight papers selected from 26 submissions, covering a wide range of topics related to the interrelationship between social media and communities in all aspects of our online and offline lives.

Two papers examine the notions of networked influence and virality in the social media age:

- **To Give or not to Give? An Exploratory Study of User Beliefs Influencing Adoption of Facebook Gifts** by Stanislav Mamonov and Raquel Benbunan-Fich, which examines how and why Facebook users engage in social commerce using Facebook Gifts and what influence their adoption and use of this service.

- **Computing the Veracity of Information through Crowds: A Method for Reducing the Spread of False Messages on Social Media** by Huaye Li and Yasuaki Sakamoto, that discusses why certain messages go viral and how to reduce the spread of misinformation on Twitter.

Two papers report on studies of the use of social media by academically-oriented communities of users:

- **Outcompeting Traditional Peers? Scholarly Social Networks and Academic Output** by Marco Bastos, which examines the potential relationship between the use of an academic social networking website and scholarly output.

- **From Dorms to Cubicles: How Recent Graduates Communicate** by David Choi, Judy Chen, Stephanie Wu, Debra Lauterbach, and Aruna Balakrishnan, that studies the changing communication practices of recent college graduates.

Specific participant populations are the subject of these papers:

- **The Use of Social Media for Shaming Strangers: Young People’s Views** by Amy de Vries, looking at the practice of online public shaming by young people and how it varies from cyber-bullying.

- **‘Nearer to Being Characters in a Book’ How Older People Make Sense of Online Communities and Social Networking Sites** by Dave Harley, Kate Howland, and Eric Harris, that interviews a group of seniors to discover their attitudes towards online communities and how they might support their local, offline relationships.

These papers examine the connection between online and offline communities and identities:

- **Bridging the Divide Between Virtual and Embodied Spaces: Exploring the Effect of Offline Interactions on the Sociability of Participants of Topic-Specific Online Communities** by Spyros Angelopoulos and Yasmin Merali, studies the influence of offline interactions on the sociability of participants in an online community.

- **Motivations for Participation in the YouTube-based “It Gets Better Project”** by Laurie Phillips Honda, explores why people participated in a YouTube-based, viral campaign called “It Gets Better Project” in support of the LGBTQ community.

In sum, all papers in this minitrack support the notions that (1) social media use for maintenance of communal relations and social network building is rapidly expanding, and that (2) community building and management can be key success factors in society, encompassing work, education, social life, and play. These papers also improve our understanding of how the design of technologies and practices might influence the networks and behaviors emerging from the use of such media and vice versa.