Encouraging and Maintaining Engagement in Online Communities: The Importance of Translation and Coherence

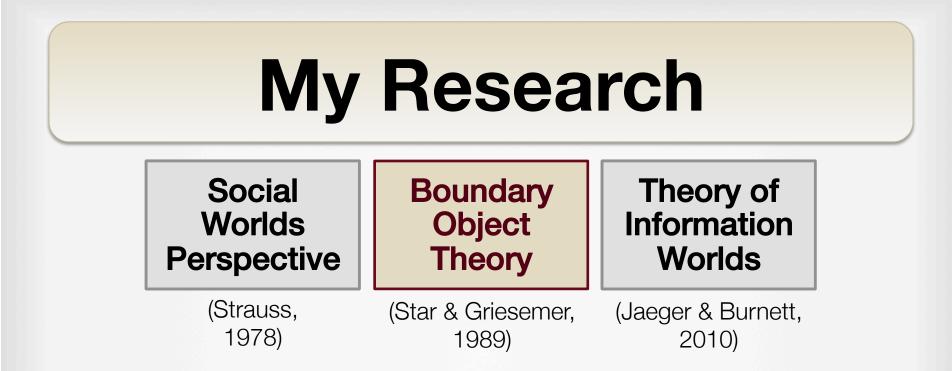**Adam Worrall**

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iConference 2015

Newport Beach, California, USA ✶ March 24-27

Create ✶ Collaborate ✶ Celebrate

iSchools

Workshop On the Role of Engagement in Information Seeking Contexts – March 23, 2015

My Research

Social Worlds Perspective	Boundary Object Theory	Theory of Information Worlds
(Strauss, 1978)	(Star & Griesemer, 1989)	(Jaeger & Burnett, 2010)

What roles do **LibraryThing** and **Goodreads** play, as boundary objects, in (a) *translation / coherence* between **existing** communities and (b) *coherence / convergence* of **emergent** communities around their use?

Worrall, A. (2014). *The roles of digital libraries as boundary objects within and across social and information worlds* (Doctoral dissertation). Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL. http://www.adamworrall.org/portfolio/dissertation/

Worrall, A. (2015). "Like a real friendship": Translation, coherence, and convergence of information values in LibraryThing and Goodreads. In G. Olson (Chair), *iConference 2015 proceedings*, Newport Beach, CA, March 24–27, 2015. Champaign, IL: iSchools.

Translation, Coherence

(Star & Griesemer, 1989)

- **Translation**

  - "The task of **reconciling meanings**" **and understandings** of objects, methods, and concepts **across communities** (p. 388)

  - People can "**work together**" and **remain engaged** with systems, communities (p. 389)

- **Coherence**

  - The **degree of consistency** between different **translations and communities**

Engagement Online

- **Sociability**, usability of online communities
- **Nine questions** users can ask
- Speak to coherence of
  - common, shared **social norms and rules**
  - **valuing of information**
  - **information behavior** and **activities**

Engagement Online

- **Provide structure** for translation, coherence
  - State community **purpose** in **clear** terms
  - Explain **membership, rules**
  - Develop **help pages**, **FAQ** lists
  - Provide **direct help** when/where needed
  - Facilitate **information seeking, searching**
  - Encourage leaders to **stimulate continued interaction**

Key Findings

- Pages, threads created to **introduce group, rules, members**
- **Technology** allowed
  - **interaction, cataloging, engagement**
  - creation and maintenance of **organizational** / **community structure**
- **Boundary spanners**
- **Strong role** as technological boundary objects

Key Findings

- Translation and coherence of **information values**
    - Often-**invisible** translation processes
    - **Better understanding** of **divergences** and **disagreements** allows coherence to **continue over time without conflict**
    - Ensures users **continue to engage, despite differences**

Wed 1:45pm Salon A-B

Implications

- **Community leaders**: Focus engagement on **processes that create resources for translation and coherence**
  - Knowledge creation, sharing, translation
  - Sharing, bridging of values, norms
  - Development of common ground
  - Role of online community as key site for information behavior and activities

Implications

- Community / ICT **designers, maintainers**:
  - Clear expressions of **site-wide norms / rules**
  - Understanding of **what info types are valued**
  - Explication of **expectations** for **normative** information behavior / activities
  - Engagement in **translation / negotiation process with users** about meanings & understandings
    - Maintain coherence, engagement **over time**

Thank you!

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Questions?