Information Values, Sharing, and Cultural Memory: Interactions with ICT Use in an Online Immigrant Community

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Abstract
Information-centric online communities have become popular sources for users, including for information sharing among immigrants that provides both informational and social support. Such communities encourage greater information sharing when users share the same judgment on what information is of value, sharing that often leads to the creation or invocation of cultural memories. There has been little research on immigrants' negotiation of information values, creation and invocation of cultural memory, and information sharing within and across the boundaries of online communities, with particular emphasis needed on their use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in information sharing. This poster presents qualitative, multi-method research in its early stages that will examine how the ICTs used by immigrant and expatriate members of Twitter interact with the information values and information sharing of community members and the cultural memory established by their communities.

1   Introduction

Information-centric online communities have become popular sources for users seeking and sharing information (Fisher & Julien, 2009; Kraut, Wang, Butler, Joyce, & Burke, 2008). Such communities encourage greater information sharing when users share the same judgment on what information is of value (Ardichvili, 2008; Haythornthwaite, 2006). Information sharing is particularly important for new immigrants to a country, who rely on social ties and the use of the Internet and online communities to find information and social support (Caidi, Allard, & Quirke, 2010). Immigrants bring their existing cultural experiences and memories and may create new cultural memories during their sharing of information with each other (Nikunen, 2013). There has been little research on immigrants' negotiation of information values, creation and invocation of cultural memory, and information sharing within and across the boundaries of online communities. Particular emphasis is needed on immigrants' use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in information sharing (Caidi et al., 2010). This poster presents early-stage research on how the ICTs used by Canadian immigrant and expatriate members of Twitter interact with the information values and information sharing of community members and the cultural memory established by their communities.

2   Background and Framing

The framework of our study is shown in Figure 1, and reviewed briefly in the following subsections.

2.1   Online Communities and Information Worlds

Online communities are computer-mediated, social aggregations of people on the Internet that interact, incorporate human feeling and emotion, and form personal relationships over time (Rheingold, 2000; Kraut et al., 2008). They are true human communities serving as emergent social constructions (Tuominen & Savolainen, 1997) broken into an "ecosystem of subcultures" (Rheingold, 2000, p. xviii), as with traditional communities (Fischer, 1975).

Burnett and Jaeger's (2008; Jaeger & Burnett, 2010) *theory of information worlds* moves beyond Chatman's focus on "small worlds" (Pendleton & Chatman, 1998) to an explicitly multi-levelled theory of communities centred around socially constructed information, with potential synergies and conflicts possible (Burnett, 2015) in

- *information behaviour*, "the full spectrum of possible normative [information] behavior ... that are available to [a world's] members" (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010, p. 23);
- *information value*, the value judgments placed on information within and across worlds; and
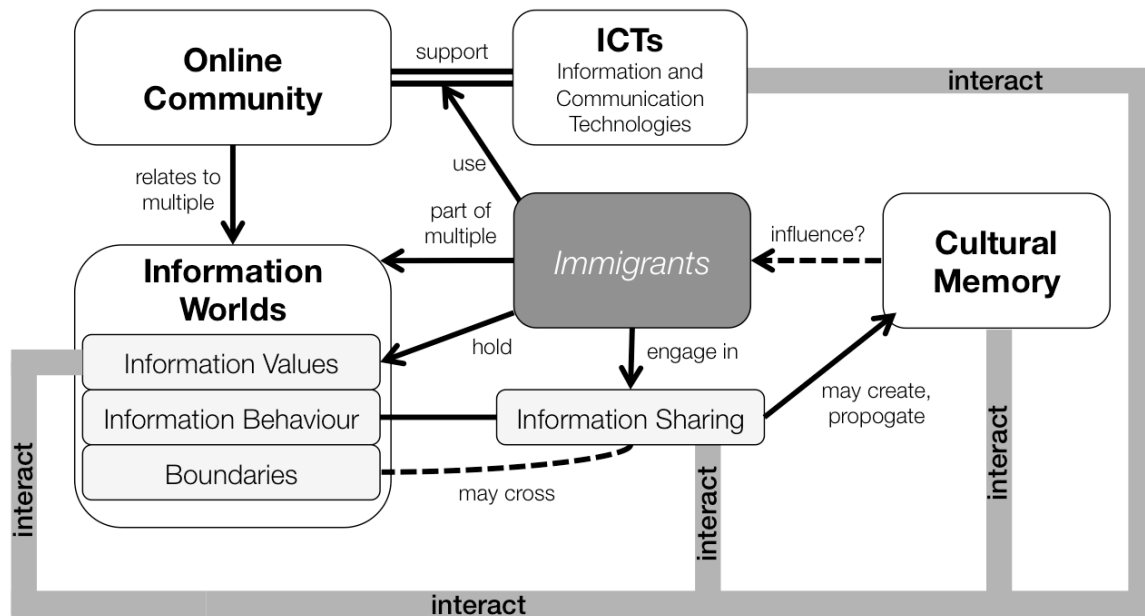
Figure 1: Framework of the study

- *boundaries*, places where "information worlds come into contact with each other," where "information exchange can—but may or may not—take place" (p. 8).

2.2   Information Values

The relative "importance … of different types of information" is perceived differently and may be contested within an information world (Burnett, Lee, Hollister, & Skinner, 2014, "Information Value" section, para. 1; see also research on values by Koepfler, 2014; Koepfler & Fleischmann, 2011, 2012; and Seraj, 2012). Users who share common ground and value information similarly are more likely to share what they know with others, creating and sharing distributed knowledge (Ardichvili, 2008; Haythornthwaite, 2006). Worrall (2015) found online community users who negotiated and understood differences in information values could continue despite these differences and even form new, emergent communities. Such translation of information values led to common ground and establishing social ties, and in turn greater information sharing, even though such negotiation was invisible work (Star & Strauss, 1999) from the users' perspective.

2.3   Information Sharing and Immigrants

Information sharing is a significant element of users' information behaviour (Case, 2012; Fisher & Julien, 2009), since users seek the most accessible information, favour interpersonal sources over formal ones, and find emotional and affective needs important (Harris & Dewdney, 1994). Information sharing covers a wide range of collaborative information behaviours (Talja, 2002; Talja & Hansen, 2006), from deliberate collaborative searching to serendipitous and unexpected sharing with a colleague. Some behaviours may be less significant (Bao & Bouthillier, 2007; Gunawardena, Weber, & Agosto, 2010), but we believe the full range of information sharing behaviours are relevant, including the encouragement of information sharing by boundary spanners (see Bechky, 2003; Kazmer et al., 2014; Kimble, Grenier, & Goglio-Primard, 2010; Worrall, 2015).

Information sharing is key to understanding immigrants' information practices; they are "likely to ask other individuals for help" first (Caidi et al., 2010, p. 507), relying on social ties, both strong and weak, to find informational and social support (Fisher, Durrance, & Hinton, 2004). Boundary spanners are especially important ties, given they are members of both the immigrant's and the local culture, but may be a barrier to successful information sharing (Caidi et al., 2010).

ICTs are a significant source of information for immigrants (Caidi et al., 2010). Mehra and Papajohn (2007) found international teaching assistants used the Internet and associated ICTs to connect the global and local elements of their lives, engaging in information sharing with their home country and in their new country that improved their social, emotional, and psychological well-being and their cultural understanding. Chien (2005) studied settlement.org, an online community and resource site for new

settlers in Ontario, Canada. After asking questions, "responding to others' postings" and "sharing personal information and experiences"—including emotions and feelings—were the most common uses (p. 127). The site "facilitat[ed] sharing of personal stories" and the "find[ing of] information and resources to help [each other] settle in Canada successfully"; members became part of a true online community (p. 157). Caidi et al. (2010) called for further research on immigrants' use of ICTs in information sharing.

2.4   Cultural Memory

Information sharing can lead to the creation and propagation of cultural memory. The amalgamation of old and new cultural memories in online communities is widely discussed in interdisciplinary literature, including the impacts of digitizing information on our expectations of access to and creation of cultural memory and public history. Cultural memory is no longer the realm of the past, but affects our present and future and exerts a democratizing effect (Buchner & Zaniewska, 2012; Campbell, 2014; Savoie, 2010).

Paganoni (2011) examined the co-construction of memory and collective narratives through blogs in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks. She theorized the events created a "point of departure" for the analysis of the present through the events of the past; 9/11 was a "time zero" event leading to all forms of memory being shared online as a form of resistance to forgetfulness (p. 284). Nikunen (2013) focused on the identity formation inherent in web sites for diaspora communities of immigrants. She observed information sharing in three online communities for Kurdish nationals, finding it drew attention to experiences potentially marginalized from the "official" memory (p. 13). Much cultural memory creation and information sharing is seen in the everyday information behaviour (Savolainen, 1995) present in ICTs supporting online communities, leading to a sense of community belonging and making cultural memory creation far more likely (Nikunen, 2013). A lack of research literature exists on cultural memory formation in online communities by Canadian immigrants.

3   Research Design and Methods

Our study addresses the identified gaps in the literature by answering the following research question: How do the ICTs used by members of immigrant and expatriate members of Twitter interact with (a) the information values of community members, (b) the information those members share and exchange within and across community boundaries, and (c) the cultural memory established by their communities? This question is illustrated by the gray "interact" lines in Figure 1.

In the first phase we will conduct ethnographic, unobtrusive observations of the immigrant and expatriate communities on Twitter. We will look for and discuss examples of information value negotiation, information sharing within and across boundaries, and cultural memory creation and invocation. This will increase our familiarity with the setting, help guide development of a qualitative codebook, and allow for research design refinement (including selecting hashtags and keywords for further data collection).

A second *content analysis* phase will collect and analyze posts on Twitter (tweets). About 500 tweets will be collected from systematically random sampled results of hashtag and keyword searches. Tweets will be coded using portions of an extended information worlds codebook (Burnett et al., 2014) and a constructed cultural memory codebook.

A third phase of semi-structured qualitative *interviews* will take place with users whose tweets and interactions imply following up could lead to insightful data. At least 15 Twitter users should be interviewed, the number varying depending on when saturation is reached. The interviews will follow pre-planned questions and themes drawn from our framing, but additional follow-up questions may emerge from the conversation. Critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954) of information value negotiation, information sharing, and cultural memory formation and invocation will provide the context for thematic exploration. Interviews will be conducted via online audiovisual media, telephone, or email; transcribed; and coded using the same codebooks as for the earlier content analysis phase.

The study will fill an identified gap in the literature on ICTs and information value negotiation, information sharing, and cultural memory creation and invocation by immigrants, providing a fuller understanding of these practices in information-centric online communities and social media environments. Significant implications are expected for the design, features, and practices in such communities and for the provision of information and social support services to immigrant communities. Related benefits exist for research on online communities and in social informatics and information behaviour.

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