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

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My Research

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?


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

(Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2003, p. 609)

• **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

(Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2003, p. 609)

• 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.
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?