



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND
INFORMATION STUDIES

“They Would Not Slag You Off At All”: Translation and Coherence of Information Values in Online Communities

Adam Worrall

Assistant Professor, SLIS

March 16, 2016

slag /slag/

NOUN

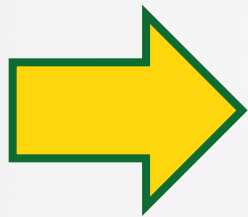
1 Stony waste matter separated from metals during the smelting or refining of ore

2 *British informal, derogatory* A promiscuous woman

VERB

1 Produce deposits of slag

2 *British informal* Criticize (someone) in an abusive and insulting manner



From *Oxford English Dictionaries*

<https://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/slag>

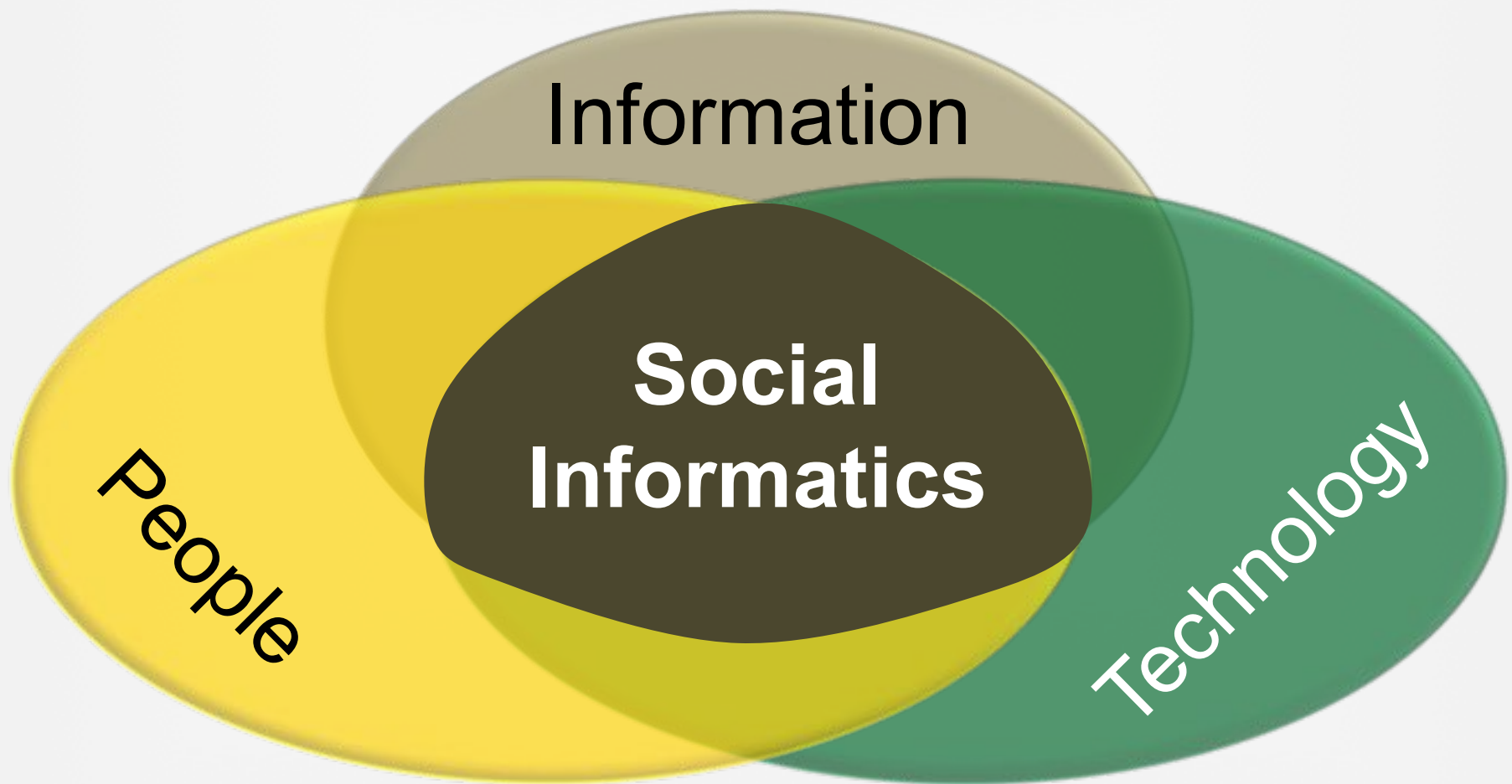
Online Communities

- Popular sources for users **seeking, sharing information**
(Fisher & Julien, 2009; Kraut, Wang, Butler, Joyce, & Burke, 2008)
- Greater sharing encouraged when users share **similar judgments** on **what information is of value**
(Ardichvili, 2008; Haythornthwaite, 2006)
- However, **perfect agreement (or coherence) not required** for productive sharing, strong sense of community



Photo by flickr user Gage Skidmore, used under Creative Commons
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/gageskidmore/8566717881>

A Social Perspective



A Social Perspective

Information-centric online communities

Computer-mediated

Interactions

Human feeling, emotion

Personal relationships

True human communities

Emergent social constructions

“Ecosystem of subcultures”

(Fischer, 1975; Kraut et al., 2008; Rheingold, 2000; Tuominen & Savolainen, 1997)

There remains a **continuing need** to improve our understanding of **social phenomena** including **behaviours, norms, values**

Values

- **Value-sensitive design, values in design**

(Shilton, Koepfler, & Fleischmann, 2013)

- **Roles played by values** in design of technologies, sociotechnical systems
- **Embedded social values** in digital library design

(Fleischmann, 2007)

- How value is created in **online communities**

(Seraj, 2012)

- **Information value** in **information worlds**

(Jaeger & Burnett, 2010)

Three Studies

1. Complete
2. Early stages of data collection and analysis
3. Funded but yet to begin

All three studies relate to **information values in online communities**, and their potential **translation** between users and **coherence** within and across communities.

Study #1

(Worrall, 2014, 2015, further publications in preparation)

Case study approach (Yin, 2003)

LibraryThing and **Goodreads**

Social Perspective

Social Informatics

Social Constructionism

**Social
Worlds
Perspective**

(Strauss,
1978)

Boundary Object Theory

Translation

Coherence

(Star, 1989; Star & Griesemer, 1989)

**Theory of
Information
Worlds**

(Jaeger & Burnett,
2010)

Framework

Boundary Object Theory

(Star, 1989; Star &
Griesemer, 1989)

- Cross boundaries between **multiple** communities
- Used within, adapted to many **simultaneously**
- **Weak** structure across, **strong** structure within
- Support negotiation, **translation**
- Maintain **coherence**
- Potential **convergence** of new communities

Framework

Boundary Object Theory

(Star, 1989; Star & Griesemer, 1989)

Translation

- “The task of **reconciling meanings**” and **understandings** of objects, methods, and concepts **across communities**

(Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 388)

- People can “**work together**” and **remain engaged** with systems, communities

(p. 389)

Coherence

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

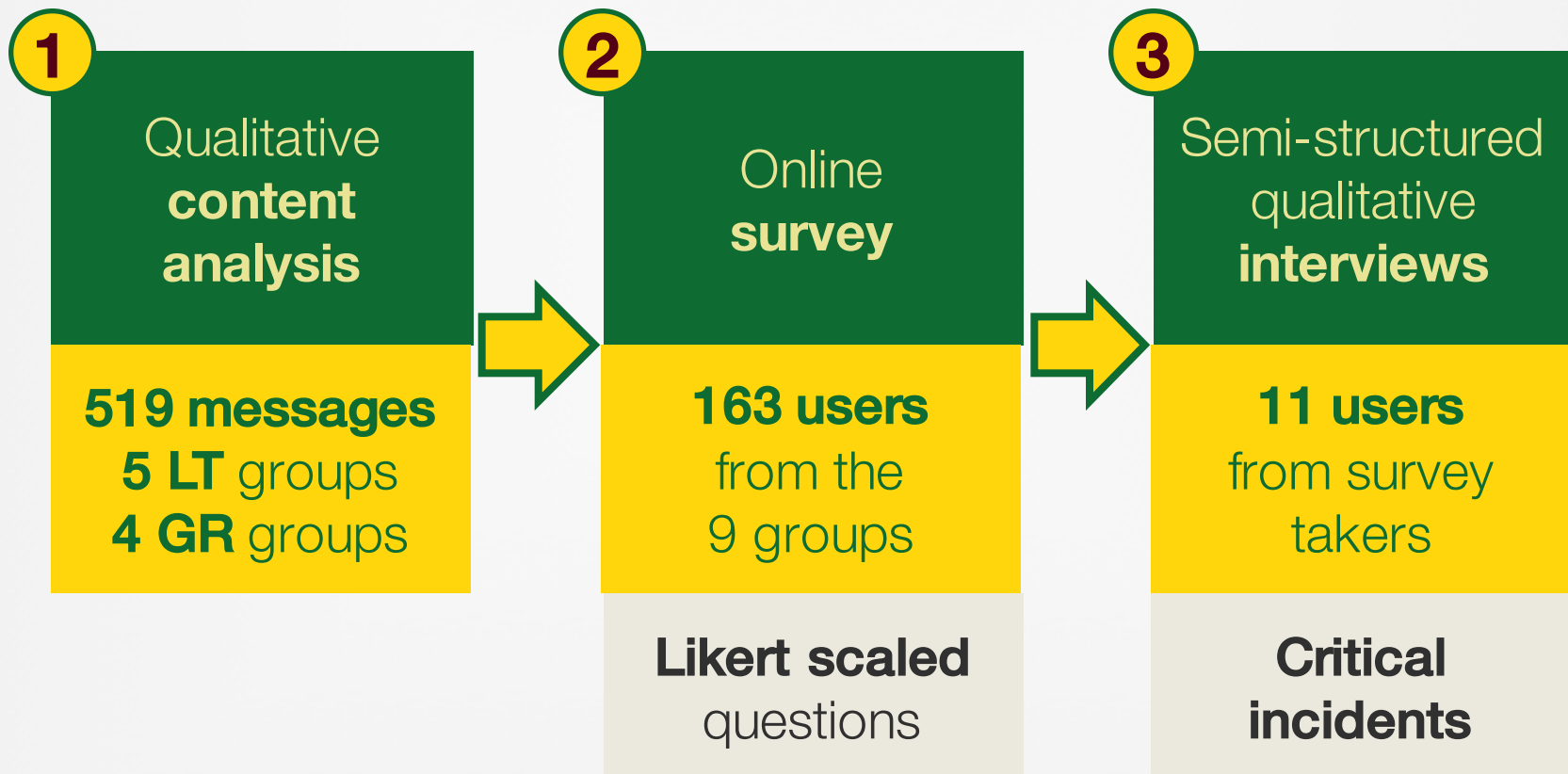
(Star & Griesemer, 1989)

- **Convergence** of new communities

Research Question

What roles do **LibraryThing** and **Goodreads** play, as **boundary objects**, in the **translation, coherence**, and **convergence** of *information values* between the **pre-existing** and **newly emergent** social and information worlds of their users?

Methods



Coherence

- Some **aligned**, some **diverged**

Author Will promoted his book

Brian: “please read [the site’s author policy]. And when your message is flagged ... do not take it too personally.”

Will apologized

Brian: “Good show! We’re a very forgiving group. :)”

- Impact of **existing** values, information worlds

For example, Kevin noted religious views “might [lead to] different opinions about a book ... [with] a religious slant ...”

Disagreements

- **Weaker / nonexistent** coherence, convergence

Jennifer: “you know you do have that one thing in common...” —a love of books and reading— “...but a lot of times **that’s the *only* thing you have in common.**”

Disagreement over info value led some people to “**exit [a group] en masse**” despite Betty feeling they were “some of the people ... [who] had the **most interesting conversations** about the books.”

Sense of Community

- Felt by many

Lindsey: “a happy **surprise**”

Miriam: “**affirming**, to know so many other people who like the same things”

Compared by Sam to a “**tavern**”

- **Differences, divergences OK**

Members of one of Ann’s groups “would **not slag you off at all**; not even if you went on there and **said that you loved *Twilight*** and said it was the best thing ever written.”

Convergence

- **Personal, collective** opinions and thoughts
- Sharing **not** always explicitly acknowledged

Amelia: “keep my paws crossed”

- **More explicit in interviews**

Rachelle: “and I’m like, oh! Here are people who read the same books that I read, and I can talk to them about it. ‘Cause I know *nobody* in real life who reads the same books that I do.”

Ann shared values, interpretations of fantasy fiction with others (despite not all agreeing)

Values-Based Role

- **Strongest factor** in qualitative findings, but **not significant factor** in survey (p = 0.709)
 - May be **invisible** to community insiders
- **Perfect** coherence, convergence **not required**
- **Infrastructure** (as boundary object) sufficiently **rigid and flexible** to be common, valued, yet allow differences

Translation

- Important for **negotiating, reconciling interests, values** from existing communities
- Co-construction (Seraj, 2012; Rehberg Sedo, 2011a)
- Bridging, translating → **greater info sharing**
 - As in knowledge management literature
(Ardichvili, Page, & Wentling, 2003; Bechky, 2003; McLure Wasko & Faraj, 2000)

Invisible Work

- Translation, coherence, convergence of information values as **invisible work**

(Star & Strauss, 1999)

- Without realizing, have interests, opinions to share
- Evident in **reflection** (interviews), **conflicts**
- “**Vague**” but simultaneously “**quite useful**”

(p. 607)

Study #1 Conclusions

- **Significant roles** in translation, coherence, convergence of information values
 - Understanding differences, willingness to translate allowed for community existence, emergence
 - Similar to **maintaining “a real friendship”** (Melissa) – **emerges** from **invisible background**

I gratefully acknowledge funding from a Beta Phi Mu Eugene Garfield Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship and a Florida State University Esther Maglathlin Doctoral Research Scholarship.

Study #2

(Worrall & Hyduk, 2016; ongoing)

- **Information sharing** particularly important for **new immigrants** to, **expatriates** in a country

- “Likely to **ask other individuals** for help” **first**

(Caidi, Allard, & Quirke, 2010, p. 507)

- Rely on **social ties**, both strong and weak, to find **informational** and **social support**

(Fisher, Durrance, & Hinton, 2004)

- **Boundary spanners** especially important ties

(Caidi et al., 2010)

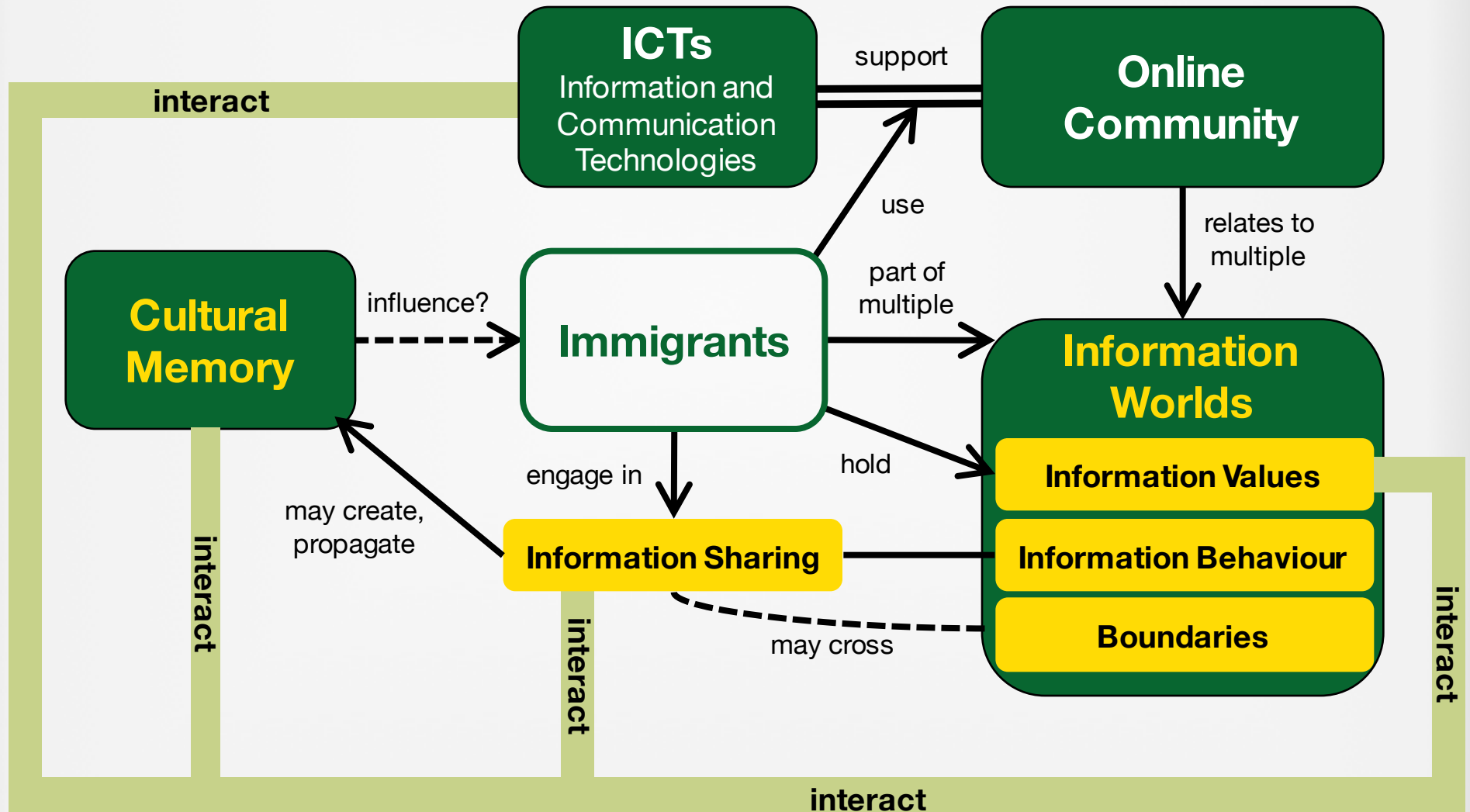
Immigrants' ICT Use

- **ICTs** a **significant source** of information for immigrants (Mehra & Papajohn, 2007)
- In *settlement.org* (ON), **asking questions**, “**responding to others’** postings,” and “**sharing personal information and experiences**” —including **emotions** and **feelings**—were **most common** uses (Chien, 2005, p. 127, 157)

Immigrants and Cultural Memory

- Immigrants bring **existing cultural memories** and may create **new** ones through information sharing
- Much cultural memory creation, information sharing seen in **everyday information behaviour** (Savolainen, 1995)
 - community belonging, more likely cultural memory creation (Nikunen, 2013)

Framework

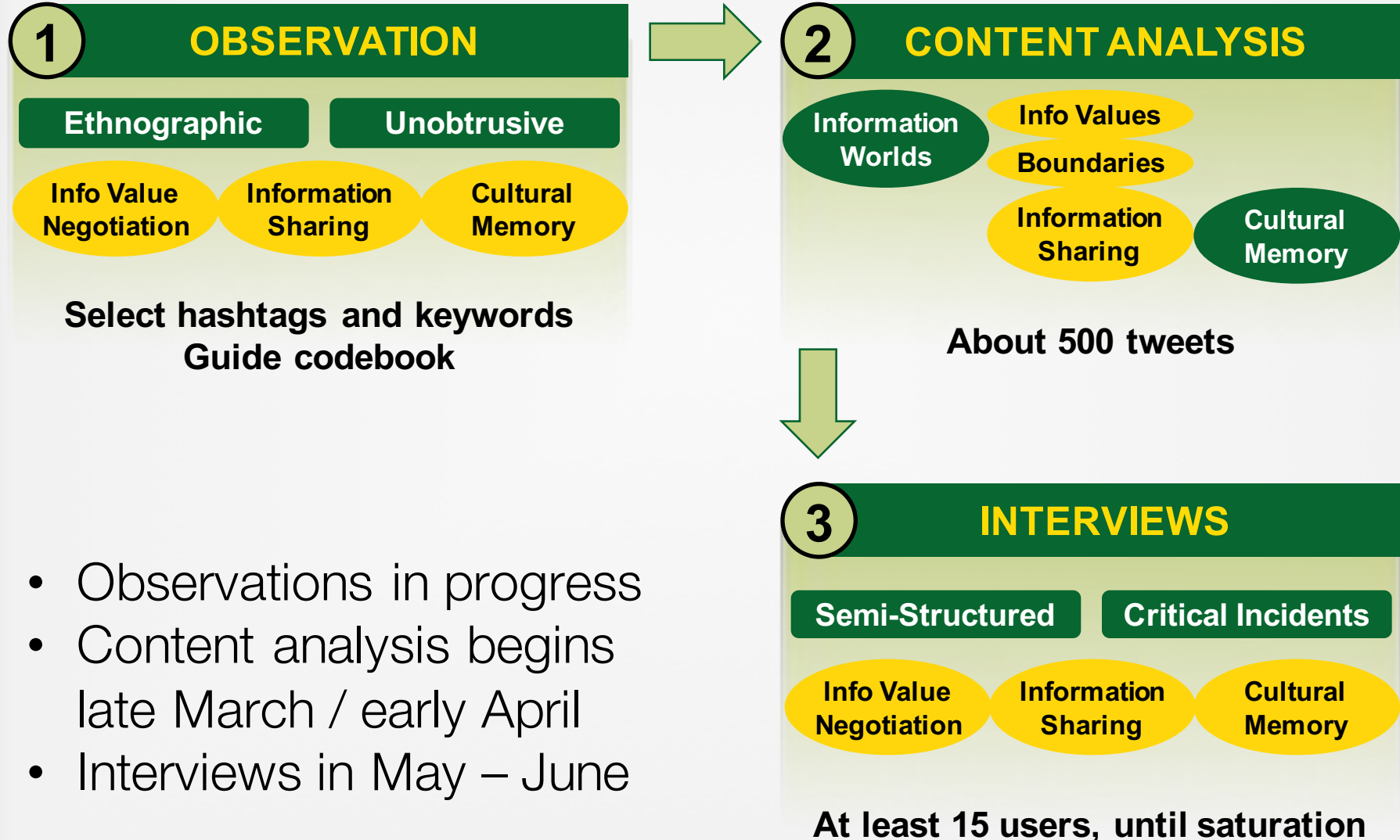


Research Questions

How do the **information and communication technologies (ICTs)** used by **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?

Methods



- Observations in progress
- Content analysis begins late March / early April
- Interviews in May – June

Initial Findings

(very preliminary!)

Valued and Shared

- Canadian **culture, connections**
(or lack thereof; incl. articles, jokes)
- **Experiences** of expats
(self-authored, interviews)
- **Moving to Canada** (opinions
and facts; political elements)
- Scenic **photos** of Canada

Initial Findings

(very preliminary!)

Boundaries

- **Physical:** countries, provinces
- **Languages:** English (dialects), French, German, etc.
- **Communities:** geographic, political, media-based, expatriate, follower, hashtags

Initial Findings

(very preliminary!)

Cultural Memory

- **Experiences** of new immigrants
- Attending **events** (e.g. concerts)
- **Life events** (e.g. births)
- **Supportiveness** of Canadians
- **Homesickness**
- Becoming **permanent residents**

I gratefully acknowledge funding from a Faculty of Education Start Up Grant.

Study #3

(funded: Faculty of Education SAS grant, 2016-17)

- **Social and emotional support**

- Important **motivations** for online **information sharing**, including on **social Q&A sites**

(**Generally**: Ardichvili, 2008; Burnett & Buerkle, 2004; Frost & Massagli, 2008; Kazmer & Haythornthwaite, 2001. On **social Q&A**: Choi, Kitzie, & Shah, 2014; Kim, Oh, & Oh, 2007, 2009; Kim & Oh, 2009; Worrall & Oh, 2013)

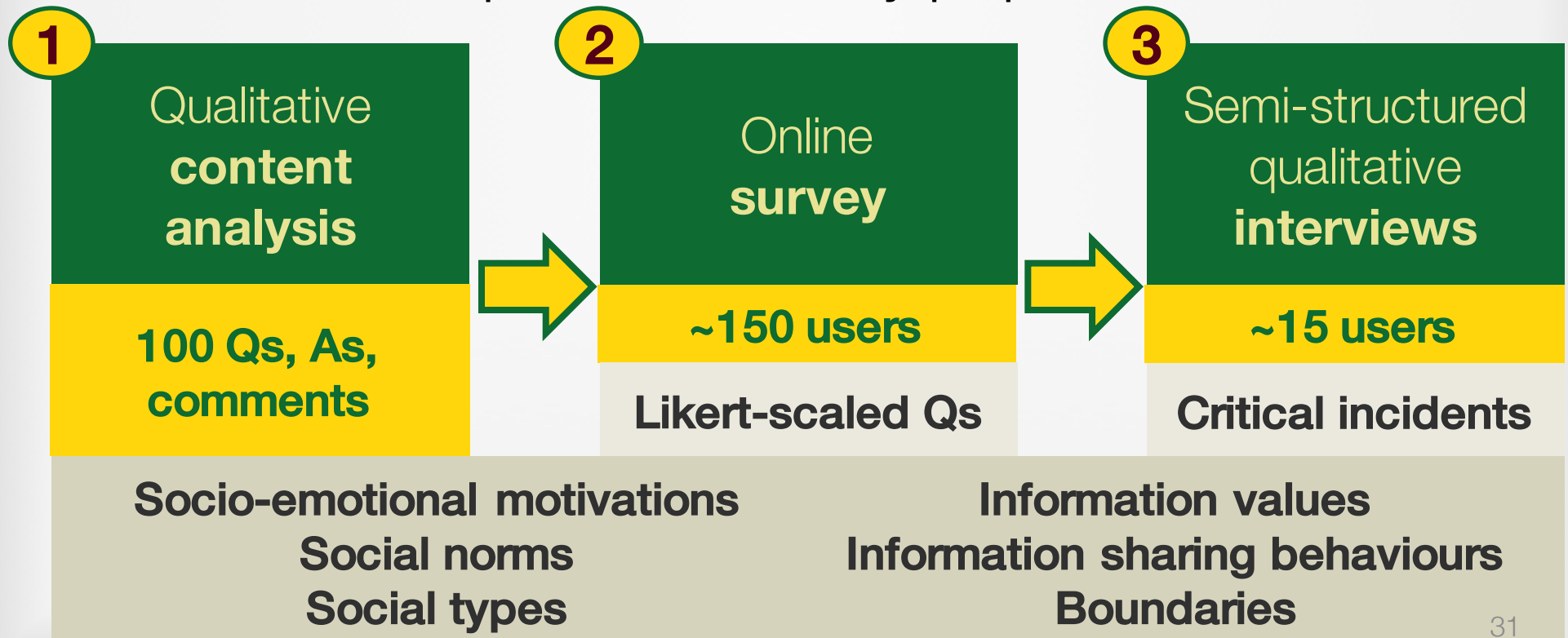
RQs

- What **social and emotional factors** motivate users to **ask questions, answer questions, and share information** with others in social Q&A?
- Of these, do any contribute to **coherence** of community, social norms, social types, information values, and information behaviours among users? **How?**

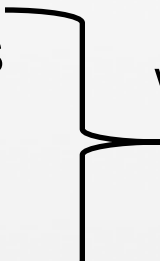
Setting and Methods

- **StackExchange Academia**

- One of the largest, most popular Q&A sites
- Familiar topic, moderately popular sub-site



Conclusion

- **Translation, coherence** of information values (and other phenomena, too!) have **great significance** for
 - **information sharing** in **online communities**
 - provision of **informational, social, and emotional support** to users
- **“Do you know where you’re going to?”**
Sociotechnical interactions between
 - information-centric online communities
 - ICTs that support them
 - users’ information behaviours
 - socio-emotional motivations
 - information value judgments

within and across boundaries



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND
INFORMATION STUDIES

Questions?

References cited available upon request

Thank you!

worrall@ualberta.ca
<http://www.adamworrall.org>