

“Like a Real Friendship”: Translation, Coherence, and Convergence of Information Values in LibraryThing and Goodreads



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iConference 2015

Newport Beach, California, USA • March 24-27

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March 25, 2015

Background

- **Sociotechnical contexts** of digital libraries
- Experimental, promising **models, frameworks, methods** of study
- Remains a **continuing need** to improve our understanding
 - **Social phenomena** including **behaviors, norms, values**

Social Digital Libraries

- **Content, services, organizations** (Borgman, 1999)
- **Information, knowledge creation and sharing** (Lankes, 2009, 2011)
- **Socially constructed**
- **Parallel physical libraries**
 - “Link people to ideas and to each other”
(Pomerantz & Marchionini, 2007, p. 506)
- Share many characteristics of **online communities** (Ellis, Oldridge, & Vasconcelos, 2004; Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2003; Rheingold, 2000)

Framework

Social Paradigm

Social Informatics

Social Constructionism

**Social
Worlds
Perspective**

(Strauss, 1978)

**Boundary
Object
Theory**

(Star & Griesemer,
1989)

**Theory of
Information
Worlds**

(Jaeger & Burnett,
2010)

Case study approach (Yin, 2003)

LibraryThing

LT

and **Goodreads**

GR

Values

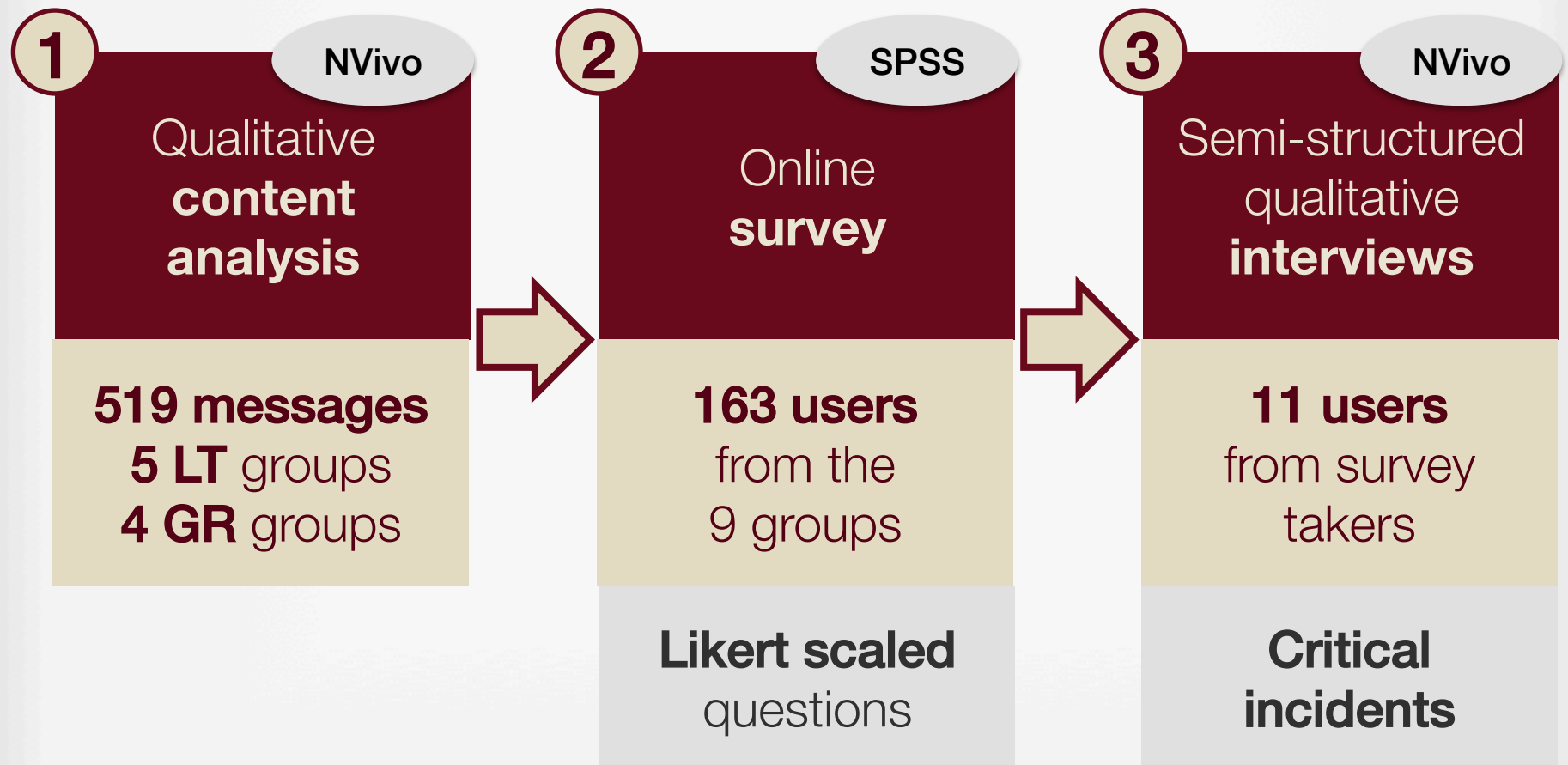
- **Value-sensitive design, values in design**
(Shilton, Koepfler, & Fleischmann, 2013)
 - **Roles played by values** in design of technologies, sociotechnical systems
 - **Embedded social values** in digital library design (Fleischmann, 2007)
- How value is created in **online communities** (Seraj, 2012)
- **Information value** in **information worlds**
(Jaeger & Burnett, 2010)

Research Question

As part of a larger study:

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?

Method



Convergence

- **Personal, collective** opinions and thoughts
- Sharing **not** always explicitly acknowledged
 - “keep my paws crossed”
- **More explicit in interviews**
 - “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.” (Rachelle)
 - Ann shared values, interpretations of fantasy fiction with others (despite not all agreeing)

Coherence

- Some **aligned**, some **diverged**
 - Author Will promoted his book
 - Brian: “please read [LibraryThing’s author policy]. And when your message is flagged ... do not take it too personally.”
 - Will apologized
 - Brian responded “Good show! We’re a very forgiving group. :)”
- Impact of **existing** values, information worlds
 - Religious views “might [lead to] different opinions about a book ... [with] a religious slant ...” (Kevin)

Conflicts, Disagreements

- **Weaker / nonexistent** coherence, convergence
 - “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.**” (Jennifer)
 - 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
 - “a happy **surprise**” (Lindsey)
 - “**affirming**, to know so many other people who like the same things” (Miriam)
 - compared to a “**tavern**” (Sam)
- **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.”

Survey Findings

- **Younger** participants felt information value played a **greater role** ($\chi^2(9) = 18.833$; $p = 0.027$; $n = 136$)
- Median score for information value **not significantly different** from a “neutral” response of 3 ($p = 0.709$)
 - Further holistic analysis discovered **nuances**

Values-Based Role

- **Strongest factor** in qualitative findings
 - May be **invisible** to community insiders
- **Perfect** coherence, convergence **not required**
 - **Despite differences** perceived, **communities form** that **users feel part of, value**
 - As in other virtual book clubs (Rehberg Sedo, 2003)
- **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 **common ground** literature (Ardichvili, Page, & Wentling, 2003; Bechky, 2003; McLure Wasko & Faraj, 2000)
 - **Explain** circumstances that **could reduce** coherence, convergence
 - **Form** valuable **social ties** with others

Infrastructure, Invisible Work

- **Context** determines values, **frequency of explicit expression** (Koepfler & Fleischmann, 2011, 2012)
- Translation, coherence, convergence of information values as **invisible work**
(Star & Strauss, 1999)
 - Without realizing, have interests, opinions to share
 - Evident in **reflection** (interviews), **conflicts**
 - **Sociotechnical infrastructure** – “vague” but simultaneously “quite useful” (Star, 2010)

Limitations

- Findings cannot be considered fully representative at larger scales, esp. survey
- Alleviated by deep knowledge of literature, mixed methods, nonparametric statistics
- **Potential transferability** quite strong

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
- **Further research**
 - **Invisible work** of value translation, coherence
 - Values in sociotechnical design **plus** information values in communities (fuzzy line)
 - **Longitudinal** studies over community **life cycles**

Thank you!



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Questions?