

Communities Going Online for Collaborative Knowledge Spaces

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Abstract

Online communities enable people and groups to rediscover the opportunities for information and knowledge sharing, live together experiences that support cooperation, and lead to open collaborative digital and social spaces that help build inclusive and collaborative communities, encourage social innovation issues, and reinforce ties for community development and a healthy society. Online communities rediscover the opportunities for social knowledge sharing practices and facilitate communication, dialogue, and integration, leading to social actors that redefine their relationships in terms of solidarity and social integration, making cohesive communities, and opening to social innovation issues.

Keywords

Innovation, Online Community, Community Development, Collaborative Spaces, Knowledge Sharing.

Introduction

Digitalization and the potential offered by Internet and technological applications enable people worldwide to rediscover the importance of building and being a community which is going online in order to contribute to value-led processes, and support social exchange, knowledge management, sharing and creation, and foster social inclusion and cohesion (Gidley et al., 2010) with regards to acting for better living within society. Online communities provide spaces for innovative solutions and ways of doing, opening to knowledge-sharing practices for social development and collaborative frameworks that support social innovation and value processes. Online communities provide a digital and social space open to strengthening collaborative knowledge sharing and exchange, improving social interaction, altruism for others, and motivations to knowledge sharing that enable online communities' members to contribute to knowledge (Faraj & Shimizu, 2018; Ma & Yuen, 2011; Yu, Lu, & Liu, 2010), enabling the digital actors to play proactive roles in engaging themselves in value co-creation experiences, processes and initiatives (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Online communities tend to enhance a collaborative view in promoting initiatives for collective action and social interaction (Plant, 2004). The role online communities may play in engendering issues and processes that may benefit effective practices for social

value and innovation is increasing over time. In particular, enhancing the collaborative view supports online communities working towards leading to innovation processes that provide issues and solutions to improve the quality of life.

Online communities are considered social aggregations emerging from the Net that enable people to support public discussions and with sufficient human feeling (Rheingold, 1993). According to Williams and Cothrel (2000), «online communities – which we define as groups of people who engage in many-to-many interactions online – form wherever people with common interests are able to interact» (p. 81). “Virtual communities are online social networks in which people with common interests, goals, or practices interact to share information and knowledge, and engage in social interactions” (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006, p. 1873). “Online communities depend upon the commitment and voluntary participation of their members” (Ren, Kraut, & Kiesler, 2007, p. 377).

Online communities provide a context for interpersonal communication, interaction, and processes of learning and participation, enabling people to play a proactive role and make useful contributions to socially and collaboratively initiated initiatives. Social interaction is the heart of communities going digital and online. Thereby, online communities empower social interaction in terms of information sharing, collaboration and collective action (Spagnoletti, Resca, & Lee, 2015). Understanding online communities as spaces for information and knowledge sharing that drive open innovation helps drive people to use the potential of digitalization and technologies in order to contribute to better quality of life offline within social spaces and communities. Enhancing the collaborative view and innovative approach in online communities supports knowledge contribution and new ideas. Online collaborative communities help drive community development and well-being.

While several studies refer to online communities in terms of peculiarities and opportunities that are open to everyone willing to contribute, there are not yet many studies that elucidate the potentialities of online communities as engines of collaborative and innovative initiatives in digital acting. The study aims to elucidate how the evolution of online communities helps shape collaborative digital and virtual spaces that breed innovation issues, opening to knowledge sharing and management. Promoting knowledge sharing and a collaborative mindset within online communities enhances community development and improves social inclusion. The study relies on a non-systematic analysis of the literature on the relationships between social inclusion, community development, and sport-for-development to identify a pathway for inclusive communities, promoting social and sustainable development through sport initiatives. Sustainable online communities identify knowledge and innovation sources to contribute to new ways of dealing with problems that affect the daily life development relies on promoting sport in all its expressions.

The study is articulated in six sections. After the introduction and theoretical framework on understanding the role of collaborative spaces in the digital landscape, the third paragraph presents the methodological section. In the fourth paragraph, the understanding of online communities in terms of community development and digital life is presented. The fifth paragraph analyses rediscovering online communities as engines of collaborative and innovative practices for knowledge issues. Finally, conclusions are set out.

Online communities between community development, collaborative spaces and knowledge sharing within digital life

The diffusion of ICTs and the Internet is increasingly making online communities one of the most important forms of online service, enhancing participation and enabling people to use their voices and express their opinions. The advancement of technology helps communication and interaction among people and supports the building of online communities that shape technology-driven, knowledge-oriented processes, becoming increasingly smart as organizations sustain social and public value creation by managing and sharing knowledge as a source and outcome of interaction and social exchange.

Plant (2004) has defined the online community as «a collective group of entities, individuals or organizations that come together either temporarily or permanently through an electronic medium to interact in a common problem or interest space» (p. 54). "Online communities offer a common forum for communication among all participating members" (Miller, Fabian, & Lin, 2009, p. 319). Online communities are groups of individuals who share a common purpose, are guided by formal and informal policies, and whose interactions are supported by different computer systems (Jadin, Gnambs, & Batinic, 2013). Online communities as social aggregation emerging from the Net, enabling people to support public discussions and with sufficient human feeling (Rheingold, 1993) encourage people to interact and share content in online environments to perform activities in the service of community, between sharing content for self-promotion and helping.

Recently, the advent of social media has facilitated a sense of connectedness and provided a means of overcoming the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to an increase in collaborative frameworks. Online communities provide a digital meeting place, leading to cooperative and collaborative efforts to deal with societal challenges, and meeting social demands in a better way, and leading to knowledge sharing-led and digital spaces.

According to Hendriks (1999) "knowledge sharing presumes a relation between at least two parties, one that possesses knowledge and the other that acquires knowledge" (p. 92). Information and communication technologies (ICTs) can make a difference for knowledge sharing and contribute to enhancing knowledge sharing by overcoming temporal and spatial barriers and improving access to information about knowledge (Hendriks, 1999). ICTs help knowledge sharing in the following ways: ICTs contribute to lowering physical, temporal and social distance as barriers; ICTs facilitate the access to information bases by storing relevant data beyond the individual levels; introducing ICTs helps to improve all the processes that involve knowledge sharing; ICTs contribute to addressing meta-knowledge that refers to the location and accessibility of relevant information bases (Hendriks, 1999).

Social media tools, and especially platforms that utilize and combine different social media technologies, are assumed to enhance intra-organizational knowledge sharing. Information technology helps to support knowledge sharing, but tools should be integrated in the social networks of which it is part (Huysman & Wulf, 2006).

Managing and sharing knowledge implies that people tend to cooperate and collaborate. Knowledge collaboration relates to «individual acts of offering knowledge to others as well as adding to recombining, modifying, and integrating knowledge that others have contributed» (Faraj, Jarvenpaa, & Majchrzak, 2011, p. 1224). According to Ipe (2003), “Knowledge sharing is basically the act of making knowledge available to others within the organization. Knowledge sharing between individuals is the process by which knowledge held by an individual is converted into a form that can be understood, absorbed, and used by other individuals” (p. 341). Within organizations knowledge sharing relates «to the provision of task information and know-how to help others and to collaborate to with others to solve problems, develop new ideas» (Wang & Noe, 2010, p. 117).

Online communities tend to shape open collaborative spaces emerging «as platforms for different types of innovators to interact and benefit from potential synergies and the cross-pollination of ideas» (Capdevila, 2019, p. 8) and “characterized by a culture of openness and collaboration concerning knowledge-sharing, skills and tools” (Boutillier et al., 2020, p. 2).

Community implies people are working to ensure mutual solidarity (Bhattacharyya, 1995), and provides social significance for protection and security, leading to good places for life and production (Bauman, 2001). Communities facilitate processes that enable people to make efforts by strengthening collective and individual sources to create conditions for sustainable and social value within society. Community refers to people discovering social ties that bind them and drive collective action for social improvement (Phillips & Pittman, 2015).

Digitalization supports social sustainability and community development that rely on social value development. As a process, the development of online communities relies on members coming and going as resources become available. The development of online social structures implies member losses with regard to a growing online community (Butler, 2001). Participation in online and virtual communities supports both motivation and connectedness of their members, and the stress (Welbourne, Blanchard, & Wadsworth, 2013).

Methodological section

The study is conceptual, theoretical, and exploratory. We select a conceptual view in order to identify new potential relationships between topics not yet enough investigated in their relationships. Conceptual papers do not provide data and refer to untested relationships, and they tend to introduce new relationships among constructs, focusing on the integration and association of topics and logical arguments, without providing data (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015). This study aims only to provide an interpretive and qualitative framework. The research is based on archival and qualitative data, considering the literature related to the relationship between online communities, collaborative view, and knowledge sharing practices in managing the working and interdependencies within online communities. We prefer to provide a non-systematic analysis and review of the literature, privileging qualitative judgments about emerging phenomena and topics that enable online actors and communities to identify new perspectives for knowledge exchange and collaborative practices for

value creation and social innovation. The journal articles that are coherently with the relationships we try to identify were selected from *Google Scholar* as the main web source and database. The selected contributions are gathered, analyzed, summarized, and interpreted, following a narrative synthesis in order to develop and advance new perspectives that contribute to explaining emerging issues and proposing theoretical models (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006; Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Young, Jones, & Sutton, 2004).

Rediscovering online communities for collaborative and knowledge issues

In the last years, the introduction and use of more advanced interactive and pervasive technology like social media and online environments and communities has tended to foster communication and interaction among individuals, and helps to enable knowledge sharing and dissemination, driving people to acquire and use information for breeding new knowledge, helping others, and contributing to knowledge that supports wealthy communities and society.

Technology supports knowledge sharing and shapes technology-driven, technology-oriented communities. Online social media have become increasingly popular in the last few years. The introduction and use of new and interactive technology in terms of the development and diffusion of online and virtual communities and platforms helps to support and design knowledge-sharing processes and opportunities.

Communities evolving over time through technology tend to adopt a smart approach and develop opportunities to manage knowledge and strengthen knowledge sharing, creating social and public value. Social media and Web 2.0 technology allow people to generate new content, create knowledge, and use data and information for sharing, enhancing the potential of communication, thereby creating technology-driven, ICT-enabled communities that become smart communities and serve as organizing frameworks for activities and forms of organization. Technology helps both private and public communities move towards smartness by enabling collaboration, using data and information to create new knowledge and share available knowledge. People, businesses, associations, public organizations, and administrations tend to benefit of knowledge sharing enabled by use of technology and embrace technology as a means and support to knowledge sharing in order to create, consolidate, and maintain social and public value.

The future of online communities' development relies on encouraging several actors to engage in knowledge sharing practices and initiatives that contribute to new knowledge creation and social value within society. Technology helps people to interact in online environments by proceeding to build smart and knowledge-oriented communities as meeting as well as collaborative spaces that benefit of knowledge sharing, acquisition and creation as source leading to public and social value creation.

The workings of online communities fuel collaborative, knowledge-led meeting spaces. Online communities should contribute to positive experiences for knowledge sharing communities (Jadin, Gnambs, & Batinic, 2013), and enable knowledge-sharing-oriented behaviors and social value-led community development by supporting altruism, the helping others as drivers of knowledge sharing enhancement (Yu, Lu, & Liu, 2010).

Online communities provide a useful and promising space for driving knowledge sharing modes that combine knowledge contribution and knowledge seeking behaviors in virtue of social relationships, attitude, and enjoy in providing support to others (He & Wei, 2009). In particular, the willingness to belong through online platforms opens to ways of promoting knowledge-sharing behaviors. Motivations to share knowledge rely on focusing on the human dimension and on strengthening interpersonal relationships in order to shape collaborative communities for learning and knowledge acquisition (Ma & Yuen, 2011).

Knowledge collaboration supports sustainable online communities that get involved individuals who are willing to share, combine, and shape their knowledge for personal and common benefits (Faraj, Jarvenpaa, & Majchrzak, 2011). Online communities contribute to shaping social capital and enable their member to share knowledge, leading to social capital emerging from knowledge capital and vice versa (Hall & Graham, 2004). Online and virtual communities contribute to knowledge supply and stimulate knowledge-sharing practices (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006).

Knowledge-sharing practices help shape and positively affect community identification that supports knowledge-sharing activities and views (Lee, Reld, & Kim, 2014). Knowledge sharing and community tend to be interrelated concepts and practices. Knowledge-sharing practices foster community participation and promotion. In particular, knowledge sharing activity level is significantly related to favorable perceptions of community participation and community promotion (Koh & Kim, 2004).

Online communities improve people's and society's quality of life and contribute to knowledge sharing within innovation-led processes and initiatives. The advent of digital technologies helps to reinforce the potential offered by information and communication technology in order to rediscover the importance of being a knowledge-led online community, working and living online by enhancing knowledge management and flows jointly with the role of digital-led cooperative processes that support open and interactive collaboration among users, participants, and members of online communities. Online leadership is likely to strengthen collaboration and knowledge-sharing practices within online communities (Faraj, Kudaravalli, & Wasko, 2015).

Online communities are evolving as digital and smart meeting places that enhance collaborative as well as innovative practices in order to improve knowledge issues and sharing as a means to drive social value and innovation better. Information and communication technologies help to facilitate and enhance knowledge sharing, enabling multi-actor participation and engagement in online debate and initiatives that empower people to share ideas, inputs, and alternatives of action, leading to social capital improvement.

Online communities encourage people to interact and share content in online environments to perform activities in the service of the community, between sharing content for self-promotion and helping other members of the community (Malinen, 2015). Online communities provide a collective space for knowledge use, sharing and flows, bringing together a mix of digital technologies and participants. Online communities contribute to building knowledge-led collaboration to support open and

user innovation and facilitate knowledge flows between the tacit and explicit dimensions.

Discussion and conclusions

Online communities help drive social development and growth by bringing together individuals and communities. Online communities help develop inclusive, digital-led, collaborative, knowledge-driven, and learning-led social environments that enable social value creation and wealth.

The diffusion of ICTs and the Internet is increasingly leading online communities to become one of the most important forms of online service by enhancing participation and enabling people to use their voice and express their opinion.

Online communities are evolving as socially inclusive organisms that improve the capabilities and skills of people and groups in rediscovering the social meaning and the importance of staying together and identifying new ways to drive sustainable growth. Online communities contribute to social development by providing open spaces for people and groups to share information and knowledge. Rediscovering the online community as an inclusive framework for collaborative efforts helps construct social relationships to ensure a better quality of life for people. Increasingly, online communities aim to build digital meeting places that shape knowledge-led, collaboration-driven open spaces that facilitate social innovation.

The aim of people and groups that contribute to an online community is to identify better opportunities for information and knowledge sharing, shaping collaborative spaces in order to promote social, economic, and public value co-creation. Online communities should aim to create sustainable value for society.

We expect that the future of online communities, jointly with the use and potential of Artificial Intelligence will be focused on identifying new spaces and meeting places for knowledge sharing, transfer and creation worldwide, providing benefits to people, companies, communities, and enlarging the perspectives that drive value creation processes.

The future of online communities relies on some elements that may support the development and useful utilization for creating sustainable value within society; to ascertain the potential of AI-driven tools to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of knowledge sharing in online communities; to examine the behavioral factors that either encourage or impede the sharing of knowledge among community members; to identify strategies for maintaining long-term engagement and sustaining the innovation capacity of online communities.

There are several policies and strategies that contribute to enhancing knowledge sharing and innovation that refer to cultural as well as collaborative issues in relation to technology's usage for continuous learning and knowledge documentation: breeding an online culture of sharing and fostering an environment where the actors are both valued and encouraged in building and driving the sharing of knowledge; encouraging cross-functional and interdisciplinary collaboration in order to combine

and enhance different areas and kinds of expertise; improving and using advanced technologies in order to implement collaborative tools, wiki, shared documents, and project management software, whereas Artificial Intelligence programs can facilitate the streamlining of collaboration.

Supporting continuous learning, enforcing training sessions, providing workshops and courses in order to ensure that community members are kept up to date with the latest trends and skills. Facilitating knowledge documentation, ensuring that the knowledge base is readily accessible, searchable, and regularly updated. Promoting transparency by ensuring that the knowledge base is readily accessible, searchable, and regularly updated. Using and employing data in order to ascertain the impact of shared knowledge on community projects and innovation outcomes.

Using technology as a driver for developing and breeding new knowledge helps processes of value creation and knowledge sharing in a digital world, leading smart, online and virtual communities to build forms of collaboration and co-create economic and social value involving all the stakeholders and actors living in the digital ecosystem.

Promoting online community development helps support inclusive and sustainable communities that work to enable competencies and energies for value-creation processes. Online communities help empower people to share information, ideas, and knowledge in order to construct wealthy living and social spaces to improve the quality of life within communities. Further research perspectives imply deeply investigating how online communities contribute to making the urban communities smart and engendering processes that help support social inclusion and contrast people's isolation within society.

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