Apples to Oranges?: Comparing across studies of open collaboration/peer production

Judd Antin
Yahoo! Research
jantin@yahoo-inc.com

Ed H. Chi
Google
ed.h.chi@gmail.edu

James Howison
School of Information
University of Texas at Austin
jhowison@cs.cmu.edu

Sharoda Paul
PARC
spaul@parc.com

Aaron Shaw
Dept. of Sociology
University of California, Berkley
adshaw@berkley.edu

Jude Yew
School of Information
University of Michigan
jyew@umich.edu

ABSTRACT

This panel seeks to begin a discussion of how we can meaningfully compare and contrast between the diverse instances of open collaboration and peer production employed on the Internet today. Current research on the topic have tended to be too platform - (e.g. Wikipedia) or domain - (e.g. Open source) specific. The panelists will be tasked with addressing this problem using their own expertise and research projects to bear on the issue. Ultimately, the panel will seek to lay the foundations for the development of theoretical frameworks and principles for the design and application of open collaboration and CBPP based systems.

Keywords

Social production, peer production, open collaboration, contribution, participation

1. INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the broad characteristics of Commons Based Peer Production (CBPP) and open collaboration [1, 2]. Characterized as a means of organizing loosely connected individuals to openly share resources and cooperate without traditional hierarchy or financial compensation, this phenomenon of mass collaboration on the Internet has also been labeled as "social production" [1] and "open source/content" production [3]. The CBPP model has been touted as a way of harnessing large numbers of highly distributed skills and human creativity towards a collective output or product. Existing work that highlights the success of CBPP has focused on highly prolific examples such as Wikipedia and Open Source software development. Additionally, there is emerging attention being paid to the adoption of CBPP models that are focused on entertainment, creative reuse, and cultural expression.

CBPP, as a model of harnessing participation and organizing individuals, is extraordinarily powerful and applicable to many different problems. However, current research on CBPP has tended to be application- or domain-specific, with a large proportion of work focusing on Wikipedia and Open Source software development. Less attention has been paid to how the characteristics of CBPP map across different domains of use and how these efforts resemble or differ between different communities. There is presently a lack of meaningful discussion about how to compare the strengths and limitations of peer production efforts across different contexts. Additionally, technical platforms and systems that enable social production are adopted and abandoned at a rate that makes it difficult to scientifically study them with an established framework. What is needed is a generalized understanding, in terms of theories or design principles, that can provide practical advice to designers, developers, and managers of systems that encourages open participation, contribution, and elicit sharing from the users.

To illustrate, CBPP has been used to harness the contributions of disparate individuals towards the production of a unified output/goal in the user contributed and maintained online encyclopedia, Wikipedia. In the music-remixing community, ccMixter, the principles of CBPP are used to encourage the contribution of music samples towards the production of diverse derivative remixes. Both of these examples demonstrate the successful application of CBPP principles in very different contexts and domains. However, these two efforts are also fundamentally different in many aspects, for example in their goals and outcomes. How do we meaningfully begin to think about the useful similarities or differences between CBPP efforts like Wikipedia and ccMixter? How do we expand our understanding to additional domains such as Citizen Science projects like Galaxyzoo, distributed folksonomy systems like Delicious, and creative animation communities like Newgrounds?

The aim of this panel is to better understand how to compare and contrast across instances of CBPP use in different contexts. What are the variables that matter? And how do we account for the differences in domains and contributed content? The discussions generated by this panel will lay the foundations for the development of theoretical frameworks and principles for the design and application of open contribution and CBPP-based systems.

The panel seeks to bring together a diverse group of researchers and experts whose work focuses on the study, design, management, and use of CBPP in different contexts. The organizers of this panel have sought out individuals whose work would bring a diversity of experience and opinions to the session.

We also seek to make this panel an interactive experience for the audience. We plan to set up a wiki site to which audience members are able to submit and also co-author questions for the panelists prior to and during the session. By doing so, we hope to facilitate more focused discussions on the topic and allow the panel to moderate the questions that they will answer as well. The

wiki site will also serve as a repository of the literature and methods that the panelists (and other interested contributors) have used in their different research projects on peer production. We will solicit for contributions from each participant on this panel and also from the audience members during the session. We hope to keep this repository up as a resource for the future and continuing work that this panel addresses.

2. FORMAT OF THE SESSION

- The panel will take about 90 mins in total.

- It is envisioned that the panel will be made up of:

    - Intro panelists and context setting by the panel chair (10mins)

    - Position statements by the 6 panelists (10mins x 6)

    - Responses and general discussion from panelists (10mins)

    - Q&A through submitted questions to the panel's wiki site and audience participation (10mins)

3. PANEL PARTICIPANTS

3.1 Confirmed Panelists:

- Judd Antin (wikipedia)

- Ed Chi (Wikidashboard/Mr. Taggy)

- James Howison (Open source)

- Sharoda Paul (Twitter/Collaborative Sensemaking)

- Aaron Shaw (crowdsourcing/peer production)

- Jude Yew (ccMixter)

4. BIO SKETCHES

4.1 Judd Antin

Judd Antin is a social psychologist and research scientist in the Internet Experiences group at Yahoo! Research. Judd's areas of expertise include incentives and motivation for online collaboration, online communities, collective action and social dilemmas, as well as trust, reliability, and credibility. His research interests center on user-generated content, social media, the wisdom of crowds, distributed work, and all other forms of online collaboration. Working with laboratory and field experiments, surveys, and qualitative methods, Judd strives for a holistic understanding of participation and collaboration and translating that understanding into innovation for Yahoo! products.

4.2 Ed Chi

Ed H. Chi is a research scientist at Google. He was fomerly the area manager and a senior research scientist at Palo Alto Research Center's Augmented Social Cognition Group. He led the group in understanding how Web2.0 and Social Computing systems help groups of people to remember, think and reason. Ed completed his three degrees (B.S., M.S., and Ph.D.) in 6.5 years from University of Minnesota, and has been doing research on user interface software systems since 1993. He has been featured and quoted in the press, including the Economist, Time Magazine, LA Times, and the Associated Press.

More bio/info can be found at http://edchi.net

4.3 James Howison

James Howison is an assistant professor at the School of Information, University of Texas at Austin. His research examines the impact of technology on organizing, especially new ways to reduce the trade offs between individual and collaborative work. His past work has examined the structure and organization of collaboration in open source software production teams.

4.4 Sharoda Paul

Sharoda Paul is currently a Computing Innovation Fellow at the Palo Alto Research Center (PARC). Her broad research interests lie in the fields of computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW), human-computer interaction (HCI), healthcare informatics, collaborative and social web search, and social media. More specifically, she is interested in understanding and supporting collaborative information seeking, search, and sensemaking within small groups and social contexts.

4.5 Aaron Shaw

Aaron Shaw is a Ph.D. candidate in the Sociology Department at UC Berkeley and a Fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard. His research focuses on political and economic dimensions of collective action online. Aaron's current projects address the effects of power inequalities in information sharing communities; the relationship between online participation and political engagement; the effects of online participation among venture-funded Internet startups; and the motivations of contributors to commercial crowdsourcing markets and non-commercial peer production projects.

4.6 Jude Yew

Jude Yew is a Research Fellow at the School of Information, University of Michigan. His goal as a researcher is to investigate and design systems that encourage individuals to share, participate and engage in prosocial behavior in online environments. His past work has examined content sharing behavior in a variety of contexts ranging from online music remixing communities to synchronous video sharing environments. He is currently studying the users of Scratch and ccMixter to provide a socio-technical understanding of the relationship between amateur digital creators and the computational social system where they work.

5. REFERENCES

1. Benkler, Y. 2006. *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom.* Yale University Press, New Haven.

2. Lessig, L. 2004. *Free Culture: The Nature and Future of Creativity*. Penguin, London, UK.

3. Weber, S. 2004. *The Success of Open Source*. Harvard University Press.