

*The Invisible Participants:  
Cultural Capital and Lurking and De-  
lurking on the Internet*

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# Outline

- What is Lurking?
- Why People Lurk
- Active Political Participation and Forms of Capital
- Research Question and Hypotheses
- Methodology
- Results and Discussion
- Conclusions and Contributions

# What is Lurking?

- Definition – lying in wait vs. to persist in staying
- One way Communication vs. Interactivity
- Positive vs. Negative
  - Free riders – negative
  - Don't flood the forum – positive (Information Overload)

# Why People Lurk?

- Learning about the community
- Sense of belonging
- Free riding
- Information Overload
- Reaction of the Community

# Active Political participation

- Spiral of Silence (for lurkers, Katz, 1999)
- Social Capital (Putnam)
- Cultural Capital (Bourdieu)

# Social Capital

- Definitions – Bourdieu vs. Putnam
- Types of Social Capital
  - bonding, bridging, linking
- Lurkers contribute to the group social capital, do not gain individual SC

# Cultural Capital

- 3 states
  - Embodied ("...long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body", Bourdieu, 1986)
  - Objectified (cultural goods)
  - Institutionalized (papers, diplomas, etc.)
- Different features
  - Skills and familiarity with cultural codes
  - Language
  - Socialization

# Forms of Capital and Active Political Participation

- Macro-level, micro-level and meso-level reasons
- Bowling Alone – Social Capital and Active Participation
- Cultural Capital -> Access to Information -> Active Participation (Clague, Gleason and Knack)

# Research Question

- **R1: How does people's cultural capital affect their active participation in virtual communities?**

# Hypotheses

- **H1: Individual's cultural capital positively correlates with the level of user's activity.**
- **H2: Individual's cultural capital positively correlates with de-lurking. This correlation will become weaker for longer time lurkers.**

# Methodology

- Challenges
- Research Population – Open University forums and ReachOut
- Variables
  - Virtual Cultural Capital
  - Lurking and de-lurking and others
- Social Communication Network (SCN)

# Social Communication Network (SCN)

- Type of affiliation network
- Connects people through artifacts
- POST links and READ links
- U1 is connected to U2 if
  - U1 read what U2 posted (the POST link)
  - U1 read what U2 read (the READ link)

# Measuring Variables

- Cultural Capital - measured as self report of cultural activities, socialization is important
  - Density of a personal SCN

$$PersonalDensity = \frac{LU}{(N - 1) * P}$$

- De-lurking – amount of visits to the community before first posting
  - 10%,30%,50% thresholds

# Research Population

- Open University Forums - 8 months (September 2002 to April 2003)
  - 636 forums, from 1 to 3000 participants
  - From 1 to 1986 postings per forum
  - Reading heuristic – access to pages
- ReachOut – IBM tool for peer support
  - 2 communities
  - 307 and 404 users
  - 11093 and 53082 postings
  - Reading heuristic – access to questions

# ReachOut – tool for peer support and community building



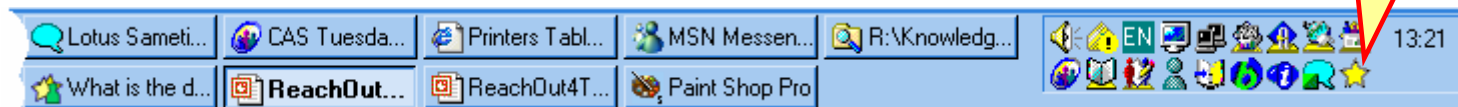
Question list provides quick view of all questions

Menu provides quick access to the discussions

A screenshot of a table titled 'Questions in My Groups - ReachOut'. The table has four columns: Status, Title, Asker, and Asked time. It lists several questions with their respective authors and timestamps.

Status	Title	Asker	Asked time
	What is the difference between ReachO...	Vova Soroka	07/03/2002 18:51
★	Testing HTTP links	Tomer Amit	07/07/2002 18:38
★	Please subscribe to groups of interest...	Vova Soroka	07/03/2002 18:00
	ReachOut starts taking off - please spre...	Vova Soroka	07/03/2002 18:31
	Can we create new groups?	Charles Sizemore	07/03/2002 18:04
★	Will this run in Linux since it appears to ...	Anthony Liguori	07/03/2002 00:55
👤	How did you hear of ReachOut?	Michal Jacovi	07/02/2002 17:13
★	What topics should we include in techni...	Tomer Amit	07/03/2002 15:01
★	Do Extreme Blue students across the U...	Yoelle Maarek	07/03/2002 19:24

System tray icon provides awareness



# Results

- Lurkers and de-lurkers demographics
- Cultural Capital results

# Demographics

- Lurker's - Consistent with prior findings by Nonnecke and Preece **and** Soroka, Jacovi and Ur (from 48% and 67% in IBM, 58% in OU)
- De-lurker's – from 26% in Haifa to 5% in Open University. Not many de-lurkers!

# Results - Cultural Capital

**H1: Individual's cultural capital positively correlates with the level of user's activity.**

**H2: Individual's cultural capital positively correlates with de-lurking. This correlation will become weaker for longer time lurkers.**

## ● IBM

- CC positively correlates with number of postings (H1)
- CC negatively correlates with de-lurking (high CC level -> people either post immediately or tend to stay for a long time)
- CC negatively correlates with is lurk variable controlling lurking time (H2)
- CC doesn't correlate with de-lurking time

## ● OU

- CC positively correlates with number of postings (H1)
- CC positively correlates with de-lurking (higher CC contributes to becoming a de-lurker – H2)
- CC negatively correlates with is lurk variable controlling lurking time (H2)
- CC positively correlates with de-lurking time (might be the opposite relation -> people who take longer time to learn have greater CC)

# Validity

- Do we really measure Cultural Capital?
  - SCN is not a regular social network, so personal SCN shows cultural socialization process
    - Not ideal, but approximation is required
  - It is not the same thing as a user's activity – incorporates reading activity as well as posting activity

# Limitations of this Research

- Heuristics
- Lurking has many causes – we just touched one possible cause
  - Use different techniques in conjunction – quantitative and qualitative

# Conclusion and Future Work

- Studying lurkers might become very important (Sarbanes Oxley)
- SN based tools for organizations and users
- Use richer SCNs – READ->POST links, POST->POST links
  - Weighted SCNs
- Continue lurking research -> find better measurement tools
- Insight for virtual community designers – foster receptive participation, too active communities create information overload – lurkers are a crucial audience

## Contact Info

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# BACKUP

# Contributions

- Measurement technique
- SCN
- SC and CC in virtual communities
- Insight for virtual community designers – foster receptive participation, too active communities create information overload – lurkers are a crucial audience

# Cultural Capital

- Pearson correlation for CC, numPosts, delurkingTime, delurker metrics
- Regression: CC and delurkingTime – num of posts for active users
- IBM: CC + lurking time -> is lurk
- OU: CC + num links + num postings -> is lurk
- OU: CC + num links + num postings + lurking time -> is lurk