

REVIEW ARTICLE



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ONLINE PARTICIPATION AND OFFLINE EFFECTS-A REVIEW

PAYAL SHARMA¹, NAVDEEP CHOPRA²

¹M.Tech Scholar, Department of Computer Science, Haryana Engineering College, Jagadhri, Haryana, INDIA

²Head, Department of Computer Science, Haryana Engineering College, Jagadhri, Haryana, INDIA



ABSTRACT

From its very beginnings, the needs of the real (offline) life have advocated changes to the Internet. As Well, Internet has defined the way humans live and behave in the real (offline) life. We review the literature around the two areas of Online participation, and Offline engagement and outline the trends. Online participation is not just driven by the 'Social Factor' but also drives the 'Social Influence' of participation. Our review has implications for future research and practice.

Keywords - Online Interaction; Offline engagement; Online engagement ; Online Activism

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INTRODUCTION

People interact online either for Instrumental reasons (to seek information) or to fulfill their social needs (to form bonds & relationships). Over times novel and varied online tools have been invented to meet such needs.

Significant literature exists across fields of psychology, Social sciences and Technology, to study Internet-based interaction and its effect on user's offline behavior. Most of the literature, however, have focused primarily on individual's (offline) well-being, largely ignoring the potential benefits at more inclusive levels of analysis (community and society) (Pendry, Salvatore, 2015).

We review the literature around the two areas of online participation, and Offline engagement and outline the research trends. We synthesized that online participation is not just driven by the 'Social Factor' but also dictates the 'Social Influence' of participation. Our review has implications for future research and practice. . We rely on contribution from (Lutz, Hoffmann, Meckel, 2014) to base our review on online participation.

Literature on offline participation is picked up from popular Literature portals using the generic search terms "Online Participation, Online Activism, and Offline Engagement'. Use of these generic terms gave us a significant list of articles for consideration out of which more relevant ones were considered for final review. With our review, we identify key contributions in the area of online participation and offline engagement. We believe that this review will of help to foster future research in effects of online participation on offline behavior.

ONLINE PARTICIPATION

Disciplinary boundaries

Online Rice and Fuller identified "online participation" as one of six emerging global areas of research. In fact, among the six emerging global themes, the topic of participation experienced the strongest growth in interest (Rice and Fuller, 2013). Yet, the research on "Online participation" is highly segregated into specific sub-discourses (Lutz, Hoffmann, Meckel, 2014). Lutz, Hoffmann& Meckel distinguished different forms of online participation and identified five relevant sub-discourses: cultural,

business, education, health and civic engagement. Out of these, research on online political participation and civic engagement (OPP & CE) is identified as the most prominent and extensive research field.

Antecedents to Increased participation

Across the five identified, sub-discourses, the antecedents to online participation varied significantly. Research on OPP&CE focuses primarily on demographic and political antecedents, Research on Online participation in Education (OEP), identified socio-demographic antecedents and OCP (Online Cultural Participation) is often initially driven by functional motives which are then gradually replaced by social motives. Research on Online participation geared towards business' (OBP), discovered psychological antecedents and usefulness of the websites as prime factors for participation. Online health participation (OHP) research considered demographic and social antecedents to participation.

Research on improving participation in an online gaming environment, suggested designs that encourage relationships among members to increase commitment (Farzan,Dabbish & Kraut, 2011). Earlier research by (Ren, Harper, Drenner, Terveen, Kiesler, Riedl & Kraut, 2007), inspired by the social psychological theory, explored two approaches for increasing attachment in an online movie database community. With identity-based attachment, members felt more connected to the community as a whole and to community's purpose. With bond-based attachment, members felt more connected to the other members. The research suggested that theory-inspired design can lead to increased member attachment to online communities and increased participation reflecting on the social, psychological antecedents to participation.

OFFLINE EFFECTS

Individual Well-Being

Debates on the potential pros and cons of Internet-based interaction have been ongoing. Time spent online has been shown to be associated with increased depression and other emotional problems (Carden & Rettew, 2006; Morgan & Cotton, 2003)

and impaired academic performance (Junco, 2012). However, many researchers have arrived at a more positive view of the consequences of internet-based interaction, arguing that online interaction can supplement rather than supplant face-to-face interaction (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001). When, Why and How online interaction affects Individual Well-being is more important a question than whether Internet affects positively and negatively (Pendry, Salvatore, 2015). Pendry and Salvatore coined "Forum Identification" inspired by "Ingroup Identification" theory to study Online Forums and answering When, Why and How Forum Interaction may affect user's individual well being.

Offline Engagement

Internet use can strengthen social contact, community engagement and attachment (Kavanaugh, A, Carroll, J. M., Rosson, M. B., Reese, D. D., & Zin, T. T.). In Meta analyses of existing research on Social Media use and participation, (Boulianne, 2015) suggested an overall positive relationship between social media use and participation in civic and political life. (Feezell, Conroy& Guerrero, 2009) studied political engagement on Facebook and predicted that online political groups strongly influence offline political participation by engaging members online. Forum Identification model adopted by (Pendry, Salvatore, 2015) predicted all types of forum users to experience improved civic engagement to the extent that they come to "identify" with the forum.

Online Activism

Online Activism is defined by (McCaughy, Ayers) as politically motivated movement relying on the internet. (Rotman D,vieweg s,Yardi s,Chie,Preece J, 2011) studied differences between different types of online social activism in terms of outcome and engagement level discussing both the potential positive and negative outcomes of such participation. (Feezell, Conroy& Guerrero, 2009) concluded that online groups perform many of the same positive civic functions as offline groups, specifically in terms of mobilizing political participation. In a similar study, Empirical evidence

from an online survey among environmental activists and non-activists confirms that online action is considered an equivalent alternative to offline action by activists and non-activists alike.

DISCUSSION

Wikipedia defines "Online participation" as 'the interaction between users and online communities on the web'. However, To date, there is no established or widely accepted and applied definition of the term. In fact, many studies on online participation suffer from a lack of a clear conceptual and theoretical foundation (Hoffman, 2012).

In a systematic literature review on 'Online Participation', (Lutz, Hoffmann & Meckel 2014) adopted a new definition encompassing three dimensions (Creative, social and motivational). "Online participation is the creation and sharing of content on the Internet addressed at a specific audience and driven by a social purpose". (Lutz, Hoffmann & Meckel 2014) definition includes social purpose as an important constituent for online participation. An Online community with a clear social purpose and directed to specific audience has a potential to direct social movements offline. In this sense, Lutz et al' definition applies equally well. Although not reflected in (Lutz, Hoffmann & Meckel 2014) review, the 'Social antecedents' to Online participation are considered for all the five specific sub-discourses. Both the research streams – Online participation and Offline participation – are driven by 'Social factor' to participation although in opposite directions. While 'social antecedents' dictate improved online participation, improved online participation will drive improved 'social benefits'.

CONCLUSION

The review attempted to summarize the existing literature around online participation and its offline effects to identify key contributions and help foster future research in effects of online participation on offline behaviour. The review will be particularly of interest to researchers studying offline civic engagement as a consequence of online participation.

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