

Geography and Community: New Forms of Interaction Among People and Places

American Behavioral Scientist
53(8) 1194–1207

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DOI: 10.1177/0002764209356250
<http://abs.sagepub.com>



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Abstract

Today location-based data, such as GPS coordinates, are increasingly being incorporated into Internet sites such as Flickr, Jaiku, and Placeopedia. In turn, new practices are emerging that evoke innovative ways of relating among people and between individuals and places. This article investigates this geographic turn in networked interaction—particularly, emergent sensemaking regarding the role of location in distributed communities. The author uses an inductive, grounded theory methodology based on ethnographic interview and artifact data to compare the microblogging practices of two communities: those using Twitter and those using Jaiku. Findings suggest that the organizing practices of the two groups are quite different, despite the similarities in the tools they use to interact. Although each platform allows for the development of peripheral awareness and ambient intimacy within user groups, the design affordances of Twitter as a straightforward broadcasting tool result in social patterns that are quite distinct from those of Jaiku, whose design enables threaded conversation. As a result, the communal bonds among Jaiku users appear to be built on thematic, conversational interaction that relies little on shared geographical references. Twitter users, with less robust means of threaded response, tend to broadcast individual reports from various geographical outposts. Communal bonds are thus formed on the basis of recognizing the highly indexical references, which in turn reinforce a common geographical locus for the community. The article concludes with a discussion of how design, though not determinate of interaction directly, is influential in shaping social patterns that emphasize different types of communal bonds.

Keywords

microblogging, social interaction, community, location

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Thus, it is a good time to remind ourselves that online groups are indeed a qualitatively new medium. We are far from a final understanding of them. Rather, we are at the point where systematic research on them can begin to bear fruit. It is extremely important, then, to continue to approach these media as first drafts, not finished products, and hence open to revision and redesign on the basis of the results of research. Research can identify, describe and understand the specific forms of social life within computer-supported environments and the related benefits, drawbacks and consequences for participants, culture and society. Such research findings can become the basis for the further development—technical, institutional and cultural—of these communication forms toward socially-desired ends.

Feenberg and Bakardjieva (2004, p. 41)

The rise of the Internet in the 1990s established an infrastructure for interaction among individuals throughout the world. Through e-mail and chat, on bulletin boards and in chat rooms, distributed social networks were formed, struggled to survive, and in many cases persevered and prospered (Kendall, 2002; Rheingold, 2000; Wellman, 2001). Today, technical developments and online social venues allow for richer methods of presenting ourselves and interacting with one another via images, videos, and avatars, whether at home, work, or on the go. In line with these developments is our increasing adoption of the language of community to describe our distributed digital connections (Baym, 2007; boyd, 2006; Chayko, 2007; Jones, 1998; Ross, 2007).

Despite popularity in today's social media discourse, the notion of what qualities or activities constitute an online community remains malleable, as Feenberg and Bakardjieva suggest in the opening quote. To date, researchers have defined online communities as being, in part, imagined (Anderson, 1999; Feenberg & Bakardjieva, 2004), as emergent social forms motivated by feelings of commitment (Fernback, 2007), as enactments of interpersonal communication (Gochenour, 2006), and as groups jointly engaged in purposeful activity (Chayko, 2002, 2007; de Souza & Preece, 2004). Rather than create cause for alarm, this diversity confirms the need for continued research on the topic. Empirical investigations can answer probing yet open questions such as, What types of interactions constitute communal ties or form group identity online? What characteristics act as defining boundaries within distributed communities? What other social structures or organizing¹ practices exist that might help to augment our understanding of today's collective activity online?

This article contributes to this discussion by looking closely at the dynamics of two communities of microbloggers. Using data drawn from a larger study on emergent sociolocative practices—that is, the use of geographical elements within social online venues—I compare the microblogging practices between a set of Twitter users and a set of Jaiku users. Not only does this comparison highlight the ways that distributed communities are changing with the inclusion of mobile and geographical elements, but it reminds us that the construct of community, already multifaceted,

will likely grow as we begin to investigate it empirically within today's network society.

Study Design and Methodology

The work presented here is a portion of a larger study centered on understanding the components of individuals' sociolocate broadcasting practices. This project was inspired by a pilot study that identified new broadcasting scripts that individuals used—typically though not extensively via mobile devices—to make announcements regarding their self in place, the experience of being in a place, or about their activities in general. I am interested in the motivations that people have for sharing this type of information, the ways that they conceive of their community of interaction, and the impact that particular technologies appear to have on types and forms of interaction. Herein I examine how two sets of individuals use microblogging tools—specifically, Twitter and Jaiku—to communicate with one another and, through this process, how they constitute particular forms of community.

Briefly, microblogging involves the textual authoring and posting of 140-character missives, sometimes called *status updates*. Twitter's prompt to users, for instance, is to answer the question "What are you doing?" In the case of both Jaiku and Twitter, all posts are publicly accessible online unless specifically designated as private; that is, there are no gradations of familiarity (e.g., family, friends, public), and all posts are searchable via Google. The social structure in Twitter and Jaiku is a system of directed linking between individual users. A user can sign up to follow the feeds of any other user; conversely, each user typically has a cadre of people who have elected to follow him or her. In the parlance of Twitter, these are an individual's "followers" and in Jaiku, his or her "contacts." The network of followers and followees is what many refer to as their Twitter or Jaiku community.

Twitter and Jaiku have several important design differences that are worth noting. First, Jaiku provides a means to thread posts into conversations. Anyone who wishes to comment on another's post (regardless of established contact affiliation) is free to do so. Threaded conversations are persistent and can be returned to—in sequential coherence—by clicking on any part of the stream (see Figure 1). Threaded conversations are so important to the intended coherence of Jaiku as a microblogging tool that it is being marketed with the tagline "Your Conversation."

In Twitter, "conversation" can be achieved among potential interlocutors only by using the special syntax (i.e., @username) to direct a reply from a follower to the original post's author. Use of this syntax guarantees that a link will be made between author and respondent—that is, the reply will be inserted into the original author's feed, although no sequential integrity is maintained between posts. All that the original author sees is a new post by a follower that has been specifically directed to him or her. The work of interpreting linked posts into a larger conversation is left up to the recipient. The effect of this disjointedness, as one informant put it, is akin to "shouting across a crowded bar to someone." In other words, a person is unlikely to be heard in context, if at all.

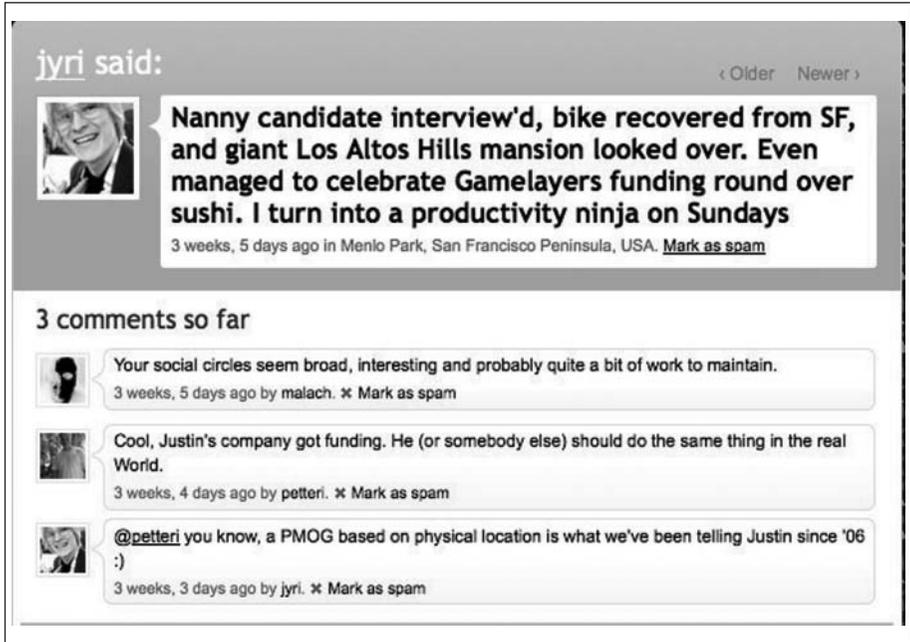


Figure 1. A threaded conversation in Jaiku

A second design difference between Twitter and Jaiku bears comment. Twitter is primarily a tool for making textual posts. Jaiku, however, allows its users the ability to make textual posts (similar in style and function to Twitter's) as well as the option of importing RSS feeds into their stream—Flickr photos, blog posts, del.icio.us bookmarks, even their Twitter feed. As a result, Jaiku feeds (see Figure 2) provide a multiplex view of a person and his or her activities, instead of a strictly textual one. Imported feed posts also act as links to bring interested parties to the original source, if desired.

Finally, as it pertains to the locative nature of microblogging, Jaiku allows its users to identify each post with a geographical location. Users of the Symbian S60 and Android operating systems on their mobile devices have the option of automatically updating their locations (and, thereby, the location tags attached to their posts) according to cell tower identification; as such, individuals can manually update their locations, complete with informal geographical references as well. In Twitter, location is an element that can be attached only to one's profile information as a static tag identifying a hometown. Technically inclined Twitter users can employ a special syntax (i.e., @L: coordinates) to share their location with others, although this is rarely done. The different locative capabilities of these two tools showcase their origins: Jaiku is the brainchild of two former Nokia developers, whereas Twitter spawned from the founder



Figure 2. *Jaiku* posts: one textual post (140-character limit) and three imported feeds (blog, del.icio.us bookmarks, Flickr)

of the popular blogging tool Blogger. In essence, Jaiku was designed to be a real-time indicator of community in space via networked mobile devices, and Twitter was meant to exploit a familiar blogging framework, one that was quite locationless. This difference becomes more salient in later sections of the article.

Data Collection and Analysis

To gain the best insights on the emergent practices of sociolocate broadcasting, I devised a two-prong data collection approach composed of open-ended interviewing and artifact collection. Over the course of 9 months (July 2007–March 2008), I conducted qualitative interviews with 25 individuals (10 Twitter users and 15 Jaiku users). I conducted the interviews in person and via Skype online and I sought to capture users' thoughts, ideas, and opinions about such topics as perceived sense of community, privacy, and usage patterns. I interviewed 10 people who used Twitter (6 in person, 4 by phone) and 15 who used Jaiku (1 in person, 14 by phone). Because my original research question focused on doing inductive work on locative broadcasting, I had twice as many Jaiku users as Twitter users to establish a substantive base for identifying patterns or common practices. In my original study design, Twitter microbloggers were to act as a type of control group; however, this article reports on a different set of findings—all of which are based on grounded, not statistical, methods. I undertook this data collection approach recognizing that sociotechnical practices—especially, emergent ones—involve a great deal of technological framing (Orlikowski & Gash, 1994) regarding nascent norms among users and the delineation of appropriate behaviors.

I identified viable study candidates using a combination of approaches. In a modified form of snowball sampling (Granovetter, 1976), I contacted members of my own social network and asked them to send invitations to members of their social networks to join the study. Interested parties then contacted me directly. Some members of my network agreed to participate, but I sought to identify as far reaching a respondent pool as possible and therefore kept known contacts to a minimum. Of the 25 participants in the study, I knew only 2 Twitter users before the commencement of this research.

I also used a method of direct contact within the application under investigation to solicit the participation of individuals who I thought well matched the criteria of my study. Within Jaiku, I used the threaded comments element of the interface to ask certain people—typically, those who actively used location tags or icons indicating mobile phone usage—whether they would be interested in joining the study. Twitter provides no method of contact like these other two technologies, so Twitter users were primarily recruited via the snowball methods described above. In all cases of direct address, I always mentioned my affiliation at the time and provided my e-mail address as a way of legitimizing my interest. Moreover, contacting individuals within the application arguably established me as at least a knowledgeable, if not overly active, user and helped to lend a credible impression to my entreaties.

Although I made every effort to collect a diverse set of individuals for this study, I did not purposively randomize on all possible demographic elements. Of the 10 Twitter users, 6 were male and 4 were female; of the 15 Jaiku users, 11 were male and 4 were female. The average Twitter user was 37 years old, with the eldest respondent born in 1966 and the youngest in 1981. The average age of the Jaiku user was 35, with the eldest born in 1951 and the youngest in 1984. (The older-than-expected average age of these groups likely results from my snowball sampling because I am in my early 40s.) Finally, regarding the geographic distribution of the overall participant pool, all 10 Twitter users resided in the United States. The Jaiku users were distributed across seven countries: the United States, France, Australia, England, Sweden, the Netherlands, and France. Today, Twitter has been far more widely adopted internationally, but at the time of my data collection its usage was still centered in the United States and the Bay Area, specifically.

All interview audio files were professionally transcribed, and the qualitative software application ATLAS.ti (ATLAS.ti, Berlin, Germany) was used to code interview transcripts and develop inductive memos according to traditional grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The second half of the data collection focused on capturing the behaviors of the 25 users via their production of microblog posts. I collected posts of all kinds from each user during a 4-week period: March 8–April 4, 2008. Using the screen-capture tool Grab, I took screenshots from the Jaiku and Twitter Web pages at 2- to 3-day intervals. During the 4-week period under investigation, I collected a total of 3,941 posts from the 15 Jaiku users and 1,145 posts from the 10 Twitter users, for a total of 5,086 microblog artifacts overall. I coded a subsection of each respondent's total posts (every 10th entry) according to criteria such as date, type (post, reply, feed), and content (commentary, question, personal activity). The establishment of individual-level corpuses of posts

allowed me to create an understanding of an individual's posting style, and it served to corroborate information articulated in the interviews.

Communities on the Ground and Across the Globe

Analysis of the interviews and microblog posts revealed that Twitter and Jaiku communities are establishing different interaction patterns despite the similarities of the two online tools. In line with Weick's ideas (Weick, 1969; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 1999, 2005), I consider these patterns at a behavioral rather than content level, as two distinct forms of organizing: citizen microbroadcasting (the organizational acts of the Twitter users) and conversing (the acts of the Jaiku users). I spell out these two behavioral patterns in full in the following two sections.

Citizen Microbroadcasting

Citizen microbroadcasting is a microblogging practice that focuses on sending timely, location-tagged bits of information to the members of a community. This type of broadcast typically involves individuals in the same general geographical location sharing information with one another from their particular vantage points. For citizen microbroadcasting to make sense as a form of organizing, microbloggers must perceive that a sufficient number, or even a majority, of their followers will find the broadcasted information relevant or useful. In some cases, the information passed between individuals is time sensitive; in others, the broadcasts act as color commentary on a special event—much the way that certain press conferences (e.g., new Apple releases, political conventions) are blogged during their occurrence for the benefit of an audience that cannot be in attendance.

In the simplest form of citizen microbroadcasting, a broadcaster makes reports of current events and notable places as they happen upon them. In most cases, this includes some form of commentary, such as an opinion. Geographical references tend to be indexical given that the recipient audience ostensibly has a core level of knowledge regarding a common set of surroundings. Place references are not typically annunciated, given that the recipients share a familiar mental model—that is, they are less thorough than that necessary for a broad audience without a common frame of reference (i.e., the public).

The following citizen microbroadcasts, as sent by the Twitter users during the 4-week observation period, illustrate the range of locative information possible as well as the degree of common references assumed to exist among the members of the community. With the exception of the ordering numbers and parenthetical participant information, posts are exactly as presented on the Twitter Web page. I avoid screenshots here to save space.

1. *via @a2snooze – Ann Arbor boil water advisory – E of Packard, W of Buhr/ County Farm Park – <http://tinyurl.com/2566vt> (Participant A, 3:59 p.m. March 22, 2008)*

2. *@a2b3 at eastern accents. 17 here right now.* (Participant A, 12:02 p.m. March 27, 2008)
3. *april fools snowstorm in the UP: 20" in Negaunee MI <http://tinyurl.com/2ncqdj>* (Participant A, 1:19 p.m. April 1, 2008)
4. *@PaulBHartzog @bkerr Los Angeles 2019 closes at the Michigan on Thursday, moves to the State on Friday for a week's run there.* (Participant C, 9:22 p.m. March 17, 2008)
5. *far west side microcorrespondent news: new sign at NE corner of Dexter-Maple indicating new commercial development on that site (Chiconas)* (Participant C, 9:40 a.m. March 28, 2008)
6. *luvin the free wifi at 2nd/howard. i love sf. headin over to mozilla party in a sec . . .* (Participant E, 6:42 p.m. March 31, 2008)
7. *San Francisco is actually switched off! (Mostly) L: McArthur BART* (Participant I, 8:24 p.m. March 29, 2008)
8. *cloudy and a bit chilly today in Des Moines . . . beats chilly and rainy back home in Louisville* (Participant J, 7:48 p.m. March 15, 2008)

Most citizen microbroadcasts are meant for immediate consumption. The relevance of this immediacy can be seen in Posts 3 and 8, for instance, which involve the weather. The locative information they convey has a short half-life—tomorrow it will no longer be salient, but today it might provide necessary context. Similarly, announcements about events (Posts 2 and 4) are presumably expected to be received, noted, and acted on in the current period. Once transmitted, the significance of these posts fades away quickly.

The data suggest that citizen microbroadcasts are also conceived as means of informing members of a community about critical incidents happening in the moment. For example, in Post 1, Participant A makes a broadcast about a water advisory that has just taken effect in the location specified; in Post 7, Participant I shares with others that a particular BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) station is closed. We also see the citizen microbroadcast in the format of a public service announcement among the members of a group in Ann Arbor who broadcast about an impending tornado in their vicinity. The first post in a stream of more than 20 topically linked posts (not presented here because of lack of space) made clear the emergency situation for fellow community members; thereafter, the broadcasts served the dual purpose of staking out the salient conditions as they developed from the various geographical vantage points represented, as well as maintaining visibility among the members to provide mutual assurance.

Other types of citizen microbroadcasts surface new information that may be of a less ephemeral nature than that of tornado warnings and the like. The purpose of these posts is to expose something novel as one happens upon it in the daily course of living. Typically, a broadcaster thinks that certain information needs to be shared or is important for the entire community to know. Posts 5 and 6 showcase broadcasts sent with this purpose. In Post 5, Participant C shares her knowledge about several institutional

developments occurring in her town. In Post 6, Participant E shares her discovery that there is free wireless Internet available at a particular street corner in San Francisco. These types of posts verge on the edge of being documentary, although their informality frames them as intimate pieces of advice or gossip rather than more formal contributions of knowledge.

The key point about citizen microbroadcasts is their mutual emphasis on place-related information targeted to a perceived known community. I label the perception of geographic saliency as a form of *sociolocative topography* to indicate that these broadcasts highlight certain locations within a larger “home” territory. Participant A, a social media analyst, shared with me that receiving Twitter broadcasts from his followers brought specific places to his attention that he had never before noticed:

So, there’s that sort of social dynamic of the different people at different spots. I’ve noticed sort of place awareness stuff. I’ve noticed that I’m aware of places that I didn’t really think that I would care to be aware of.

By way of contrast, Participant B, an information architect, illustrated how a physical stimulus prompts him to mentally assess the saliency of the topic, event, or geographical reference in question to members of his personal network. Upon deeming relevance, he told me, he goes ahead and makes a post:

There’ve also been occasions where I’ve said, “There’s a”—I hadn’t heard about an event going on in Ann Arbor, and I wander into—going to meet somebody downtown, wander into an event happening downtown. Didn’t even know about it, hadn’t heard about it. So, I Twitted to the group thinking they would care about this alternative energy, alternative sustainability fair happening downtown. Sure enough. Twitter lit up with “What? Where? When? How?” . . . Someone else would respond with the details or a link because I was just walking around to the description.

By putting a spotlight on the events and activities of certain locations, community members construct a shared image of a place through the content of their posts. In the way that citizen journalists use their voice and distributed geographic location to provide depth and breadth to newscasting, the citizen microbroadcasters use their mobility and understanding of their community’s needs to provide broad-ranging and timely information to that community. No one can be in all places at any one time, so the organization of Twitter users in the field acts like an octopus whose tentacles feed information to the head. The extended reach is only so good as the boundary in which the inputs continue to makes sense—that is, it is advantageous to have feet on the ground (engaged citizens or community members) broadcasting for the benefit of the whole (public or community) only if the transmissions are salient. Among my Twitter participants, local geography appeared to play a defining role in indicating salience for the community.



Figure 3. Jaiku post (Participant R, March 15, 2008)

Conversing

In Jaiku, there is a different form of organizing going on—one that reinforces a socially constructed cyberspace through conversation. Like Twitter, Jaiku has microblog posts that are short missives that allow an author to opine on any conceivable topic and share salient, even geographically oriented information, such as the textual geotagged post by Participant K and the pictorial post (Figure 3) by Participant R.

Crowded train home . . . (Participant K [Grand Central Station, New York City], March 17, 2008)

However, what is noteworthy about the Jaiku data in my sample is the degree to which location appears to lack salience within these communities. The Twitter users in my sample included geographical references in 15.9% of their broadcasts; their Jaiku counterparts, however, made note of their respective locations 13.0% of the time. Participant M put the matter of location directly in our interview:

The fact that I can now do it [use Jaiku] instantaneously from a handset and it's easy for people to see what I'm doing, it's easy for me to see what they're doing—you know, we're all either on our mobiles or on something else. *And it kind of doesn't matter where we are.* [Emphasis added]

As such, Jaiku users have come to expect interactional transparency as a part of their microblogging experience, instead of geographic contextualization.

A fairly high level of transparency is made possible in Jaiku because of the threading (e.g., linking) of posts—a design affordance distinctive to this tool as mentioned. In the minds of my Jaiku participants, the technical functionality of threading is based on the social practice of commenting and conversation, not the presence or absence of a technical feature. Indeed, conversations were often expressed in interviews as *the* notable distinction between Jaiku and Twitter. Twitter was caricatured as a platform for exhibitionists (e.g., well-known blogger Robert Scoble) who felt nothing of posting hundreds of times per day to an audience as large as they could find. By contrast, Participant K, a marketing specialist in New York, articulated the experience of Jaiku as the opposite of unidirectional

broadcasting: “You’re actually having a conversation. You’re not just, you know—it’s not just me talking.”

Conversation appears to be a means as well as an outcome of Jaiku’s sense of community. Commenting is the primary organizing mechanism for conversation, which enables persistent relationships that become grounded in trust over time. According to Participant R, who uses Jaiku in his native Sweden, the ability to make comments on posts establishes any number of *entrée* points for conversation:

On Jaiku the default is that you can comment on anyone’s present updates. And thereby you can sort of build on that. You can just ping them once in a while and after a while, there’s slowly a relation being built—it may be shallow or it might just be . . . but you sort of make yourself known to that person by just commenting. So I think without comments Jaiku wouldn’t have been anything.

Similar words are echoed by Participant O, an Australian software developer, who noted that it is the persistence of conversations that leads to trust among interlocutors:

I think probably that the over-time kind of thing is the thing that builds up the relationship and the trust and then some people consistently come back and comment. And you consistently have conversations with certain people. . . . It’s those consistent ones that I guess you develop more of a deeper relationship with over time.

Participant O provided an example of a conversational thread that built over time; it revolved around a man’s microblogging his intention to buy a ring and propose to his girlfriend. His multiple posts on the topic carried on for several months and in the process pulled a large number of users into the conversation through offers of encouragement and advice. Participant O recounted the details of the conversation in our interview:

And so we’ve been hearing little snippets about that along the way and then about a week ago we heard a blow-by-blow account of the surprise he sprung on his girlfriend and proposing to her and so that was the longest post. I think there were a hundred and something posts, you know, with comments on these, but that was an example of it being a community where all of these people who are communicating all the time and have been following him over the months were just so rapt to be part of that announcement process and involved with it vicariously through Jaiku.

The combination of topical continuity and social visibility—both enabled through the threading of comments—yields a different behavioral pattern among Jaiku users than do the feet-on-the-ground microbroadcasting practices carried out by the Twitter participants. Instead of broadcasts that traverse a common geographical territory, the

conversations in Jaiku appear to be enacting a cyberterritory of their own. Participant W, an American living in Finland, underscored this assertion with a reference to Jaiku as her second home: “It’s almost like a second home in the sense that you have all of these people actually, well, concerned about what you do and about the little things in your life.”

The practice of commenting and conversing in Jaiku helps to establish a communal setting referred to as a third place (Oldenburg, 1999; Soukup, 2006)—a construct conceived by sociologist Ray Oldenburg to define those informal physical places separate from the role-based dominions of home or work, which succeed in providing individuals meaningful venues for social interaction. Like the coffee shops and bars detailed by Oldenburg, Jaiku’s virtual place appears to supersede differences of culture and forces of distance (but not language, given that the lingua franca is noticeably English). In short, my data suggest that Jaiku users organize themselves around conversation, which in turn affords them a shared conceptualization of a virtual third place where bonds of trust tie individuals into a type of community.

Conclusion

A close look at two groups of microbloggers involved in the emergent practice of sociolative broadcasting reveals one basic and already well-researched fact above all others: Similar tools do not necessarily yield similar practices. When scrutinized in detail, we see that the similarity is somewhat superficial in the case of Twitter and Jaiku. The capability for Jaiku users to thread comments alters the otherwise straightforward, essentially unidirectional experience of posting 140-character missives into a potentially shared experience based on a platform for conversation. In Jaiku, extended interactions allow users to develop feelings of familiarity and trust with their interlocutors. This trust reinforces the conceptualization of a safe environment, a virtual third place. In Twitter, users have fewer means to thread posts, so they utilize the unidirectional affordances of the tool to stake themselves out as eyes and ears within a certain geographical territory. Neither pattern is determined by the technology, nor is it even the exclusive interaction pattern of each tool. Yet the distinction between citizen microbroadcasting and conversations does suggest that groups of individuals compose their relations differently through interaction patterns afforded by the technologies in use as well as the social norms in place. As such, they may take on different qualities as communities.

This finding is exciting for those of us who revel in the complexity of sociotechnical systems because it suggests that organizing is a highly contextual and dynamic process that works in tandem with technology, not simply in response to fashionable trends or techno-deterministic constraints. This article adds to the larger discussion regarding online communities. As such, it signals that whatever types of community originate through tools such as Twitter and Jaiku, they evolve from a combination of factors—such as the geographic distribution of involved individuals, the lingua franca in use, the interface design, the availability of competitor applications, and a host of

other mediators that have yet to be discovered. As such, we should embrace the construct of community openly but plially, knowing that our knowledge of all that this idea stands in for is incomplete. These findings challenge us to probe further in our research on distributed communities and their evolving dynamics.

The conclusions presented herein must acknowledge many limitations, chief among them a limited data sample with geographic proclivities, namely, a geographically defined Twitter cluster. I welcome future opportunities to refine my thoughts on the processes of distributed organizing online, the role that geography plays (if any) in these processes, and the multiplicity of meanings embedded in the notion of online community.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article from the National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant, Science and Society Division (Award #0749618), and the Advanced Human Communication Technologies Grant, MediaX, Stanford University.

Note

1. My use of the word *organizing* reflects the work of social psychologist and organizational behavior scholar Karl Weick. He has suggested that organizing is the activity that groups do together to respond to one another's inputs in a way that makes sense to the situation in which they are all engaged—in other words, intentional collective activity (Weick, 1969; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 1999, 2005).

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Bio

Ingrid Erickson is a research fellow and program officer in the Digital Media and Learning Program at the Social Science Research Council. She received her Ph.D. from the Center for Work, Technology, and Organization at Stanford University in 2008. Her scholarly interests lie at the intersection of technology studies, communication, and organizational behavior, with a particular emphasis on the emergent practices surrounding locative technologies (e.g., GPS) in social contexts. Using primarily qualitative, ethnographic methodologies, she also focuses on understanding the implications of ubiquitous and mobile technologies on conceptualizations of place and space, boundaries of public and private, and rhetoric in the media.