Editorial

Piet Kommers*

Faculty of Behavioural Sciences,
University of Twente,
P.O. Box 217, 7500 AE Enschede, The Netherlands
E-mail: Kommers@edte.utwente.nl
*Corresponding author

Margriet Simmerling

Helix5, Mendelssohnlaan 12,
7522 KP Enschede, The Netherlands
E-mail: simmerling@helix5.nl

Biographical notes: Piet Kommers is an Associate Professor at the University of Twente, The Netherlands. His specialty is social media for communication and organisation. As a conference co-chair of the IADIS multi-conference, he initiated the conferences of web-based communities and social media, e-society, mobile learning and international higher education. He is a Professor at the UNESCO Institute for Eastern European Studies in Educational Technology and Adjunct Professor at Curtin University in Perth, Australia.

Margriet Simmerling is a Peer Consultant/Senior Manager for R&D projects in the area of e-society and web-based communities. She participated in the advisory board for the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and is active as a reviewer for the European Commission. She designs and moderates e-learning modules and workshops e-learning modules and workshops in the domain of education technology and psychology at the PhD level.

In the opening issue of this year, we celebrated the 10th volume of this journal's life. In this 4th issue, we present you articles addressing community research in various domains: teachers, 'things', patients, risks and opportunities, narratives and stakeholders methodologies. Nineteen authors from seven countries (Australia, Brazil, Japan, New Zealand, Portugal, The Netherlands and the UK) inform us about the latest research and developments.

The first step is the recognition that students become more and more familiar with online learning platforms. A lot of research is already addressing the potential of collaborative learning for students nowadays. Two remaining questions are:

1   To what extent do students in collaborative tasks indeed feel a joint need and experience a sense of community? The general opinion is that collaborative learning is a cosmetic format, mainly to reduce the teaching load and delegate the process control to the students instead of to the teachers. If we want to build further on collaborative – rather than individualistic sentiments, the articulation of the community metaphor becomes more opportune.

2   Second question then is how to match the collaborative student community with an adequate and compatible attitude and participative teacher behaviour?

It will be clear that a collaborative mentality among students, cannot just be instigated via groups assignments; at least there should be a process that makes students feel that a joint responsibility carried by existential motives and shared study mission is needed in order to make the collaborative learning genuine and sustainable.

In the article 'The potential of online academic communities for teaching staff: findings from a pilot study of the *SocialLearn* platform' the behaviour of associated lectures is investigated. Vikki McCall, Gerry Mooney, Paul Rutherford and Alison Gilmour describe the results of the social learning platform. The methodology and theoretical framework are presented and the possibilities linked to an online community are listed.

Being online and interact with your physical device, is this a precursor to a learning community? According to Bruno Cabral, Cibele Vasconcelos and Cássio V.S. Prazeres it is. In the article 'The social web of things: enabling the interaction of people and things on social networks', they present an architecture for the social web of things and report on the implemented prototype. Based on the outcome of the usage of the prototype future work is suggested.

Supporting each other is important when persons are feeling weak. How does this mechanism develop over time? Takashi Kusumi, Kanayo Ogura and Asako Miura present an interesting study. In the article 'Development of a support group using a virtual space for cancer patients', they describe innovative methods to bring cancer patients together. The analysis is innovative and the data very impressive.

The article 'Risks and opportunities of integrating social networking sites in the Australian and Portuguese workplace/communities: an exploratory study' describes the results of a survey of about 80 people in Australia and Portugal asking about their opinions on the benefits and risks of using social networking sites (SNS) in the workplace. Tomayess Issa, Pedro Isaias and Anoop Vijayarajan discuss the SNEs' benefits, barriers, impacts and policies. Also based on these results, a practical set of recommendations is formulated.

What is the role of narratives in an online community? Mariana Leyton Escobar, Dr. Piet Kommers and Dr. Ardion Beldad present a case study. The article 'The key is not to forget to be awesome: identifying narratives in an online community' focus on a specific community: the Nerdfighter. Their research shows that the most frequent types of stories that were mentioned were about fundraising projects. Inside jokes also pay an important role to shape the community's culture. In the discussion section practical implications of this research is published.

And last but not least, we present an article about stakeholders' methodology. According to Ben K. Daniel, the interesting point about this specific methodology is its emphasis on relationship building. In his article 'A research methodology for studying distributed communities of practice', he presents stakeholders analysis as a research methodology for studying distributed communities of practice.

As overall conclusion, we can say that there is a converging factor in the various fields of collaborative- and social applications. It is the growing notion that interconnectivity and extrinsic reward mechanisms are not sufficient for the creation of a sense of community; only if common values are aggregated (like in the case of Nerdfighters) and an experienced collective memory through narrative participation

become manifest, only then a perceived feeling of being responsible for each other human growth may emerge. This is essential for the 'sense of community'.

It is a pleasure to present these interesting articles. We hope it will inspire you to in contributing to new research and initiatives in the domain of web-based communities and real 'social media' the coming time.