Foreword

The importance of virtual communities cannot be denied. In areas such as e-learning, e-health, and even e-commerce, virtual communities have become crucial in communication between people. As a result of this, virtual communities have gained attention by not only practitioners, but also researchers. This book gives an overview of state-of-the-art international research on virtual communities.

VIRTUAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The focus of this book is on the key aspect of virtual communities: participation. Without actively participating community members, there would be no virtual communities at all. This book takes a scientific approach to this proposition by defining participation and contribution to virtual communities in its first section. Theoretical and conceptual assumptions underlying the notion of virtual community are presented as well as different approaches in terms of analysis (e.g., ethnography, socio-semiotics, narrative network analysis, survey, and observational data) and case studies.

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Even a brief look at the Table of Contents is enough to see that authors from several fields have contributed to this book. This is not limited to fields such as information systems and computer science, but also sociology, psychology, and philosophy. This is in line with the increasingly interdisciplinary approach needed to gain more insight into virtual communities. The chapters in this book are an important step towards integration of these fields with respect to their ideas on virtual community participation.

THEORIES BEHIND PARTICIPATION

Another commendable aspect of this book is that the second section of it is fully devoted to theories behind participation. Both theory development and validation are needed to gain more insight into the practice-based issue of virtual community participation. The importance of a theory-driven solution regarding this issue needs to be stressed in view of the omnipresence of virtual communities.
In sum, this book is highly relevant for both researchers and practitioners interested in virtual communities as it focuses on the key aspect: participation. The interdisciplinary approach employed within this book contributes to theory development and validation. This is exactly what is needed to push virtual communities forward.

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