Exploring Interactivity

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The Editor-in-Chief is delighted to announce the inaugural issue of the *International Journal of Interactive Communication Systems and Technologies* (IJICST), a new peer-reviewed journal which focuses on a broad spectrum of existing and emerging Internet-based technologies, their applications, functions, and services. IJICST aims to explore multidimensional relationships between technology and contemporary society with the purpose of broadening the interdisciplinary body of knowledge pertaining to various aspects of existing and evolving interactive communication systems, platforms, components, devices, interfaces, tools, and techniques.

This new journal brings together international experts from diverse academic disciplines and fields: communication science, media studies, public relations, advertising and marketing, business and economics, information management and systems, library and information science, knowledge management, computer science, law, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and education. In other words, scholars and practitioners from all fields that deal with interactive communication systems and technologies have a voice in this new venture. Accordingly, the journal embraces an array of investigative approaches including empirical, interpretive, historical, philosophi-

cal, and critical perspectives and utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The Editorial Board of IJICST believes that a multidisciplinary approach would yield a balanced and nuanced view of technology in a global society.

During the last decade, information and communication technologies have witnessed a tremendous growth, penetrating all areas of people's lives—from personal to public. These developments have significant implications for the way people communicate and entertain each other, acquire information, collaborate and produce new knowledge—in short, for the way people adopt and use technology. "The Interaction Age is a logical extension of the Information Age," holds Andrew Milne, CEO of Tidebreak, Inc. (2007); for, "it is built on a foundation of familiar information technologies, but it extends these technologies—and emerging new ones—to emphasize interactivity over mere content delivery" (p. 14). The Interaction Age is powered by Internet-based social interaction technologies (SIT) as well as communication tools and devices that have become omnipresent and, in Marshall McLuhan's terms, truly "the extensions of man" (1964). The underlying Web 2.0 platforms offer a broad spectrum of applications and services such as online social networks, blogs, wikis, podcasts,

RSS feeds, folksonomies, social bookmarking tools, and virtual worlds. Breaking the barriers of time and space and promoting universal access to knowledge, these advances have lead to an unprecedented level of interactivity and require innovative theoretical approaches and novel frames of reference.

Interactivity has been defined as "the degree to which a communication technology can create a mediated environment in which participants can communicate (one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many) asynchronously, and participate in reciprocal message exchanges" (Kiousis, 2002, p. 372). The articles that compose the inaugural issue of IJICST explore the various dimensions of interactivity and the functions technology-enabled interactions perform in (a) engaging audiences in participatory democratic practices, (b) facilitating online information credibility, transparency and identification, (c) implementing effective e-learning, and (d) enabling information sharing and professional development in academia.

Kim Garris, Jamie Guillory and S. Shyam Sundar examine blogs as forums for political journalism and pose the question whether the interactivity offered by political blogs can serve the public interest and contribute to deliberative democracy. These scholars view interactivity as discourse, and in their terms, "the hallmark of deliberative democracy." The study employs a sophisticated longitudinal between-subjects design with questionnaires administered at two-day intervals during the week preceding the United States midterm elections. Additionally, taking into consideration the attributes of blogging as an innovative communication channel, they distinguish between differing levels of interactivity—low, medium and high—based on a technological interactivity scale. Results of the study confirm that political blogs allow voters not only to react to political issues but also to assume the democratic responsibilities of gatekeepers traditionally reserved for conventional media. The authors maintain that blog interactivity encourages public participation but only at the most basic grass-roots level. For the less involved user,

more opportunities to interact and more points of entry into the blog should serve to enhance the vehicle's public-interest function.

Brian Carroll and R. Randolph Richardson consider interactivity in the context of online information credibility. Their study expands traditional conceptualizations of credibility through quantitative and qualitative examination of survey data of readers of two single-author blogs gathered by the Institute for the Future of the Book, New York. While some survey respondents admitted that a shared perspective with the blog creators was a reason for their choice, others referred to identifying factors such as rejection, humor, compassion for others, responsiveness to readers, willingness to admit mistakes, as well as other human characteristics as reasons for reading and trusting blogs. Analysis of the responses indicates that blog readers are recognizing the personal, individual voice of the bloggers and contrasting it with the impersonal, generalized conglomerate of "vested" voices in mainstream media. The authors demonstrate that the roles of sender and receiver become interchangeable in interactive media such as blogs. They suggest that mainstream news media may want to adopt some of the principles and techniques of blogging, specifically those of interactivity, transparency and identification.

Lorna Uden reveals that social interactions are at the core of value creation in e-learning, while interactivity is a foundation for value *co*-creation. Recent advances in the growing area of service science demonstrate that customers can be successfully engaged in the design of products and services. An e-learning system can be understood as a service system providing services to students in either hybrid or fully online format. Traditionally, the role of customers has been limited to the consumption of goods and services. The co-creation view of e-learning systems implies that in addition to being consumers, students should be acknowledged as co-producers and co-designers of educational services. The author explains that while co-creation is "a form of collaborative creativity," the locus of value creation lies in

the patterns of interactions and collaborations between the learner (the consumer) and the educational institution (the company). The proposed six-dimensional model of the co-creation of value seeks to ensure the active involvement of learners along with instructors, advisers, peers and others in e-learning systems leading to unique services that enhance learning and, ultimately, the production of knowledge within society.

Shalin Hai-Jew introduces yet another dimension of interactivity—interactivity as reflective expressiveness—and investigates the potential of blogging for discipline-specific information sharing and professional development. The article focuses on the development of a collaborative academic and professional blog, Instructional Design Open Studio (IDOS), as a socio-technical space. The author, who writes for the IDOS blog as *Eruditio Loginquitas*, reflects on the steps involved in the creation of this blog, from its early conceptualization to implementation. Designed to serve the university community as a means to disseminate information about e-learning, IDOS turned into an international resource, covering a variety of topics including technological, pedagogical, ethical, social, policy-based, and strategic issues related to online learning. The author argues that blogs can be used successfully to encourage discipline-specific information exchange and facilitate professional development and training across borders. However, Hai-Jew finds that blogging does not convey as much credibility as academic publishing and finds limitations to interactivity in blogs.

The intellectual vigor of the articles that compose the inaugural issue of the *International Journal of Interactive Communication Systems and Technologies* reflects the impressive disciplinary, topical, and methodological diversity among its contributors. With this first issue, the journal aims to initiate a multidisciplinary forum for the exchange of ideas, collaboration and sharing of innovative practices and theoretical approaches. The Editorial Board cordially invites academics, researchers and practitioners of interactive communication systems and technologies to engage in an exploratory dialogue that will identify new areas of enquiry and enrich knowledge.

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