CS498-SOCIAL VISUALIZATION

READING 5 - SOCIAL TRANSLUCENCE: AN APPROACH TO DESIGNING SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT SOCIAL PROCESSES;
SUPPORTING COMMUNITY AND BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL: SOCIAL TRANSLUCENCE: DESIGNING SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURES THAT MAKE COLLECTIVE ACTIVITY VISIBLE

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Supporting community and building social capital: Social translucence: designing social infrastructures that make collective activity visible

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This short article touches upon assembling visible social cues and allowing visible traces, which can accumulate over time, to create resources that people are familiar with, in a daily life routine basis, and use those cues in the systems they interact with to draw inferences about what is going on and what is happening which in turn can shape their collective activities more effectively and efficiently. So the main emphasis has been on the visibility. To that extend, it is claimed that these visual cues work because humans are perceptually attuned to visible cues (e.g., movement) and they (these cues) can bring awareness and make the social rules come into play. Even if it is argued that these cues may not enforce rules, it makes people accountable for their actions. Therefore designing socially translucence systems supports mutual awareness and accountability and makes users adjust their interactions to take advantage of these.

Three different user interfaces are introduced as minimalist visualizations of people and their interactions (the notion of Social proxy): (1) Babble system which takes the advantage of circle shapes to represent online conversations and people’s interactions. Social useful ambiguities are maintained through visualizing gathering or dispersion as well as how people are paying attention. Along with these shapes, a timeline is created in this system to show activities over a time frame and that allows pattern of the community to be examined; (2) Lecture proxy: a group interaction is creatively visualized using a class interaction metaphor where the lecturer will be on one side and the students on the other side. Once there is an interaction between the lecturer and a student, the student will be separated from the crowd and will stand alone. This will bring attention to such interaction. In my opinion, the distinctive strength of such proxy is that it allows lecture norms to be enforced within such interactions; (3) Auctions: Another proxy introduced in the paper for visualizing social interactions. Again authors creatively bring auctions which are social physical spaces as online face-to-face interaction. A circle boundary is used to represent the people how are in, the ones that are only listening and the ones that are actively participating (as colored dots); (4) Lines: The line proxy can bring another perspective to face-to-face interaction. This metaphor could be very beneficial for visualization of commerce-oriented interactions and can visualize time and service interactively for customer supports.

In my opinion, all these metaphors are creatively designed to visualized different types of social clues and each is useful in supporting particular types of social group and face-to-face interactions. Though as the authors mentioned, along with visibility privacy and information trustworthiness come into the picture. An example of online voting systems and the issue of privacy with respect to election is well demonstrating such issue. Nonetheless, different legal and/or social mechanisms may also come into play to address these issues. Understanding the balance required for these two criteria will help in a better design for these systems which in turn leads to a better support on social interactions.
Social translucence: an approach to designing systems that support social processes

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In this paper, cues that support human-human communication and collaboration are investigated to understand how computer network systems could be better designed to support and facilitate deep, coherent and productive online interactions and collaborations while removing the opaque on our digital system and make them translucent to social information. To that extend, socially translucent systems are defined with three distinctive characteristics: visibility, awareness as well as accountability. An interesting comparison between architects and urban designers from one side, and digital system developers from another side has been made and it is argued that in architecture and urban design, existence of a consistent and un-doubtful physics that underlay social interactions could be assumed, while in the digital world such consistency does not exist. This analogy has been creatively drawn to bring attention to the need for transforming digital realms.

In my opinion, an interesting analogy with respect to privacy and visibility is made between social translucencies vs. social transparency. Translucency as argued by the authors stands more for the power of constraints such as privacy. A clear distinction between existence of constraints, participant’s individual awareness of constraints and shared awareness of constraints is made and is it clearly showed how these things bundle together in physical environment and need to be coupled in digital environments as well. Upon defining these expressions, knowledge management and knowledge communities are introduced and the need for designing digital interfaces that allow social translucency in these knowledge communities is explored. In my opinion, this is a very interesting topic and it touches on a very interesting concept. In my domain of expertise, construction management, we heavily face with the addressed issues and knowledge management and having tools that allow proper access to information are definitely vital. The research questions posed in overcoming formidable social problems and mechanisms that allow knowledge work to be more visible are creatively drafted. In my opinion, supporting activities, visualization and reconstruction of conversations as well as organizational knowledge spaces production are essential. Based on the discussion made, Babble system has been suggested. The main elements of this system are based on portraying social information. A novel aspect is the minimalist graphical representation of the users of the systems (social proxy) which depicts their presence and activities. Based on this visualization, talking, typing and listening can be visualized. These simple yet robust cues give a sense of size of the audience and the amount of conversational activities and gathering and dispersions in social online communities. In my opinion, Babble system well supports maintenance of group awareness. For example how babble helps in showing someone’s absence and comeback is fascinating. Other visualizations of lecture social proxy, role of animation as well as greek-ed conversation visualization for giving an overview on tempo and rhythms of the conversation are very useful. Another useful visualization component is automatic reconstruction of conversation and formalizing them into summaries, indices and other distillations of content will become handy for the people who want to reuse the information. Overall the use of technology for locating hot spots without revealing people’s identities can also be very useful. These approaches will document the knowledge work and will demonstrate its value while serves as a catalyst for reconstruction. Consequently the communication and collaboration systems will be designed more as “windows” as opposed to “walls” (based on the door, window, wall resemblance). They will allow users to see each other, and make inferences about each other’s activities and support social innovations.