
Cooperativism and Human-Computer Interaction

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ABSTRACT

If social, economic and environmental sustainability are linked, then support for the increasing number of non-profit groups and member-owned organizations offering what Trebor Scholz has called “platform cooperativism” [17] has never been more important. Together, these organizations not only tackle issues their members identify in the world of work, but also provide network-driven collections of shared things (e.g., books, tools) and resources (e.g., woodworking spaces, fab labs) that benefit local communities, potentially changing, not just use of resources at community level, but socio-economic structures on the ground (e.g., [15]).

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KEYWORDS

Cooperatives; sharing economy; collaborative consumption; platform cooperativism.

In contrast to for-profit services often associated with the sharing economy (e.g., Uber, Airbnb), platform co-ops attempt to advocate ecological, economic and social sustainability, with the goal to promoting a fairer distribution of goods and labor, ultimately creating a stronger sense of community. While some HCI sub-communities (e.g., CSCW) have started to explore this emergent phenomenon, especially leveraging ethnographic research methods, researchers have called for more diverse HCI approaches to address the growing scope of challenges within platform co-ops, member-driven exchange systems, and cooperativism more broadly. This SIG aims to bring together researchers from different HCI sub-communities to identify future research directions in HCI around cooperativism and platforms.

INTRODUCTION

New socio-economic models of shared use are driving innovation in networked interactive technologies. Rapid adoption of systems of shared use, allowing people to coordinate, acquire, distribute, and temporarily adopt many kinds of resources have led to what Trebor Scholz calls “platform cooperativism” [17]. These platform co-ops and member-owned collections prioritize environmental, social and cultural values within their communities. Scholz and Schneider [18] provide examples of such co-ops, including online market places (e.g., Fairmondo, Stocksy United), financial services (e.g., FairCoop, Robin Hood Collective), swapping platforms (e.g., TimesFree), music streaming services (e.g., Resonate) and more. These initiatives have different problems to solve from the platforms which seek to create global monopolies. Prior research has identified several challenges that resource-sharing communities and platform co-ops [17] face: (a) transience among and anonymity of members of resource sharing organizations [1]; (b) poor visibility of the activities of their members and lack of accountability for shared resources [19]; (c) emergent issues of trust and reciprocity within membership and supporting online exchange platforms [8,10]; (d) limited access to shared resources for underprivileged populations [5]; (e) failure to clearly convey social and personal benefits of participation [2]; (f) lack of competitiveness, such as lack of public profile and long-term funding, compared with multinational corporations [17]; and (g) piecemeal use of interactive technologies to support their activities [3,12].

To date, HCI scholars have conducted a systematic literature review on the sharing economy in computing [6,7], published a topical journal issue (e.g. [4]) and run a number of field studies with the goal of informing the design process for sharing in its various forms and contexts (e.g. [13,14]). Efforts have been made to foster collaboration and build community within CHI and CSCW: Researchers have organized panels on the sharing economy (e.g. [9]), formulated design statements regarding sustainable sharing in local communities [16] and examined power aspects and asymmetries around digitally-mediated labor [12]. This SIG develops upon these efforts by considering the design of cooperatives as a beneficial form of sharing economy, exploring what platforms for resource management can enable. It intends to bring together HCI researchers, designers, technologists and sharing economy domain experts in the CHI community to provide multidisciplinary perspectives on the challenges faced and the opportunities that accompany them.

SIG GOALS

This SIG will help bring focus on a critical topic (how resources are shared equitably as society changes to meet sustainability goals) and also focus to the many initiatives that are addressing some part of the socio-technical picture in HCI.

This SIG aims to (1) facilitate discussion on the role of the HCI community in furthering our understanding of the emergent challenges of platform co-ops and other alternative exchange models and the role of design and technology to approach those challenges; (2) articulate a research agenda and strengthen the nascent research community interested in exploring socio-technical aspects for the local collaborative economies and in particular platform co-ops. We will reach out to researchers from the *CSCW*, *C&T*, *PD*, *DIS*, *Ubicomp*, and *HCI and Sustainability* sub-communities who will attend CHI 2019 in order to reflect on political and methodological considerations within HCI and (Platform) Cooperatives, address the lack of quantitative and system-building approaches in “the majority of HCI research on the sharing economy” [6], and energize efforts to create and foster alternatives to currently dominant forms of platform economy.

To achieve our goals, we will conduct facilitated discussion, after a round of introductions and an introduction to the challenges facing platform co-ops and other member-owned alternatives. Participants will be split into break-out groups (3-4 people) based on their interests. Each group will choose one challenge to work on. The goal is to identify distinctive opportunity areas and formulate detailed questions as to how the HCI community can attend to the issues of platform cooperatives.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

By synthesizing discussion round challenges of platform co-ops, we will produce a blueprint for a future research agenda in this emergent space in HCI. We will also plan a workshop for a SIGCHI specialized conference to expand community participation. Last, we will produce a report on our SIG website (<https://uc.inf.usi.ch/event/sig-chi-2019/>) detailing the outcomes of discussions and disseminate it within the “From Sharing to Caring” COST Action (<http://sharingandcaring.eu>), an international network of actors in and beyond academia, focused on developing socio-technical implications of the collaborative economy, and “Not-Equal” (<https://not-equal.tech>), a UK network on social justice, exploring the future of work(forces).

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