ABSTRACT

Discourse has a critical role in the social shaping and diffusion of technology innovations. Various social actors participate in technology innovation discourse, such as the firms that create and market technology, their customers, standards setting bodies and regulators. Also important are the industry ‘watchers’ and pundits -- consultants, academics, and trade and mainstream media (MSM) journalists -- who report on, review, and critique new technologies and contribute to the ‘buzz’ surrounding innovations. The influence of such actors on innovation processes has been examined but the dynamics of membership in technology discourse communities, particularly the emergence of new actors in the open and public forums of the Internet, have not yet been fully explored. Such questions are interesting, because the channels for technology discourse are undergoing significant change, as a result of the rapid developments of new media on the Internet, such as online newspapers and magazines, web sites, web logs, Wikis, video streaming and podcasts, and so on. New actors, utilizing web-based new media, have influenced traditional ways of conveying messages and disrupted historical balances of influence in fields of discourse. Yet to be “heard” amid the clamor a new actor must establish a legitimated voice. In this research, we consider how the new media of the Internet may allow the emergence of new, and possibly influential, actors in a discursive field. We are investigating this phenomenon in a longitudinal case study of a community of technology bloggers, in which we examine how the discursive practices of this new actor help establish their identity and claims of legitimacy within the broad field of technology and innovation discourse. Through four stages of emergence, we identified tensions between claims of a distinctive identity as ‘tech blogger’ and claims of legitimacy, which influenced the ways in which this new actor has become established within the discursive field. We consider theoretic implications for field-level change in technology innovation discourse, as new actors arise within new media channels.

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