

Conflicts and online community social capital

- the influence of conflict management practices

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Research question

- ▶ Community managers' job is to develop the community' SC
- ▶ Assumption that conflicts impact SC negatively
 - ▶ Past conflicts create negative inferences about partner's quality (Boon and Holmes, 1999; Buysse et al., 2000)
 - ▶ Result: relationship break-down (Aaker, Fournier and Brasel, 2004)
- ▶ Can conflicts impact SC positively ?
 - ▶ “A little rudeness and disrespect can elevate a meaningless interaction to a battle of wills and add drama to an otherwise dull day (Calvin & Hobbes fame)”.

Which conflicts should be embraced?

How to use them to develop SC in the community?

Conceptualizing online conflicts

- ▶ **Conflict:** a series of states in which two or several parties are aware of mutual incompatibility of their goals and still act so as to achieve their goals (Boulding, 1963)
- ▶ **Verbal conflicts:** conversations in which parties oppose one another's utterances, actions or selves in turn (Vuchinich, 1990).
- ▶ **Computer mediated**
 - ▶ Aggressive and deceptive behaviors
 - ▶ Social experimentation and self-exploration

- ▶ **Harm to self**

Conflicts as a source of social capital

- ▶ **Definition of status** (Mauss, 1924, Campbell, Fletcher and Greenhill, 2009)
- ▶ **Provision of sensation** (Marcus, 2008; Simmel, 1955)
- ▶ **Developing interactions** (Simmel 1955; Coser 1956).
- ▶ **Defining group identity** (Simmel 1955; Coser 1956)
- ▶ **Increasing performance** (Peterson, 2003)

Dimensions of social capital

	Structure	Relational			Cognitive		
	Network density	Trust	Norms of interaction	Identification	Shared language and codes	Shared narratives	Shared vision
Sensation	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Status	<input type="checkbox"/>					<input type="checkbox"/>	
Performance		<input type="checkbox"/>					<input type="checkbox"/>
Group identity		<input type="checkbox"/>					
Interactions			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Conflict management practices

Goals

- **Stimulation**
- **Prevention** (Zwick and Bonsu, 2008)
- **Resolution** (DuVal Smith, 1999)

} Depends on conflict intensity
(Brown, 1983)

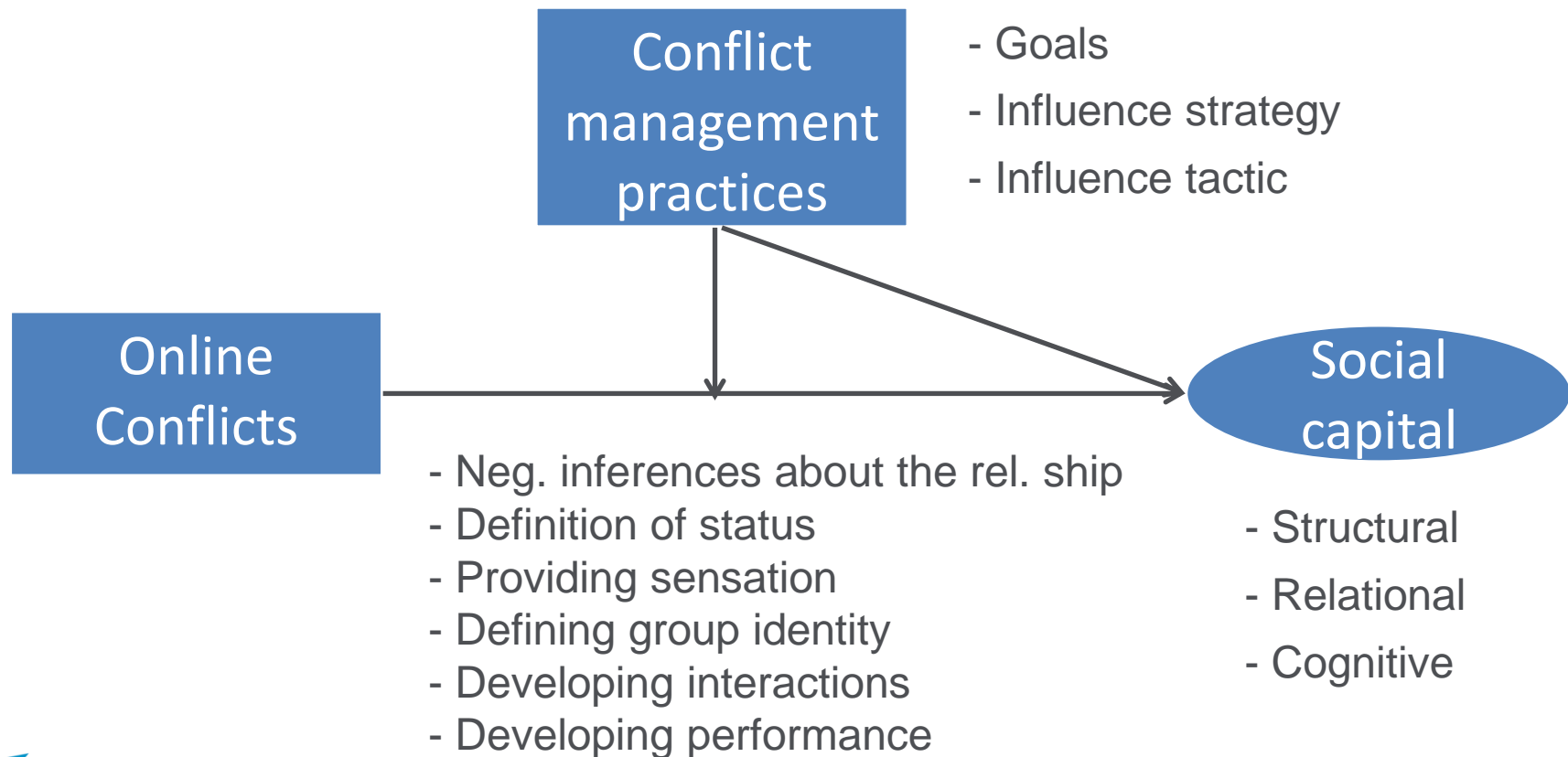
Influence strategies

- **Coercive vs. non-coercive** (Payan and McFarland, 2005)
- **Weighted vs. non-weighted** (Fraizier and Sheith, 2005)
- **Direct vs. Indirect** (Fraizier and Sheith, 2005)
- **Humanistic vs. Instrumental**

Influence tactics

- **Technology based:** feedback mechanisms (Moon and Sproull, 2008)
- **Moderator based:** persuasion, coalition (Friestad and Wright, 1994;. Heider, 1958)
- **Culture and norm based:** legal contract (EULA), social contract (etiquette) (Fairfield, 2008)

Analytical framework



Theoretical implications

- ▶ **Development of a first typology of online conflicts**
- ▶ **Conceptualizing how they can have a positive impact on social capital formation**
- ▶ **Conceptualizing conflict management in OCs**
 - ▶ Conflict stimulation?
 - ▶ Specific methods online

Case study

- ▶ **HarderFaster.net**
 - ▶ UK based OC of electro music fans
 - ▶ 11 years old – heyday 2004-2009
 - ▶ 21 forums, 350 000 threads, 7.3 million posts
 - ▶ 20 000 members, a majority of middle class “well integrated members of society”, 6 moderators

- ▶ **Methodology**
 - ▶ Netnography
 - ▶ Interviews
 - ▶ Network analysis
 - ▶ Automated content analysis

Overview of online conflicts

▶ Ubiquitous, with varying intensity



▶ Disinhibition effect due to distance and anonymity

"people fight behind the keyboard because it's easier to say things behind a keyboard. You wouldn't necessarily say it in somebody's face because they would get up and slap you in the face."

▶ Battles of ego

- ▶ you wouldn't talk to so-and-so like that (...)face to face what gives you the right to speak to them like that on here"
- ▶ "they p*** the hell out of each other"
- ▶ "he is the online equivalent of self harming"

Preliminary typology of conflicts

OBJECT	PARTIES	EXAMPLE	ANTECEDENT
Commerciality	Core members – owner	GoogleAds and donation	Commercial-communal tension
Behavioral norm	Members-moderators	"Mod' bating"	Individual-group tension
Group boundaries	Core-peripheral members	"Newbie harrassment"	Definition of group boundaries
Expertise	(Core members) ²	"How long did Tiesto play"	Competition for status

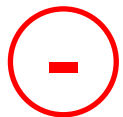
+ Antecedent of all conflicts

**Boredom-thrill seeking
Venting of frustration**

Conflicts: good for the group, bad for the individual



- ▶ **Generates interest:** “Arguably, it's always good. Because it’s generating interest. “A lot of conflict is good because people want to read what's going on”
- ▶ “ Around some catastrophic event there would be a tremendous fight happening and they would be like “OMG! Did you see *that* ?? Go and log on to HarderFaster now!” And all of a sudden there would be a massive page hit. I mean in a way for websites, in a way conflict is good!”



- ▶ **Disheartens:** “you've got to remember you want me (...), you want me to get back to using the site. There’s a fine line between banter and abuse.”

Conclusion

1. Online interactions are highly conflictual due to anonymity and physical distance
2. Conflicts vary in intensity from game to badgering to online war
3. They instantiate around 4 objects: commerciality, behavioral norm, group boundaries and expertise
4. They are driven by thrill seeking and venting of frustration
5. Conflicts are generally good for the group's social capital as they generate interest but they can be disheartening for the individual
6. Specific conflict management practices (stimulation, resolution, prevention) must be studied to understand how to maximize conflicts' positive externalities

Questions?

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Why should we care about online communities

▶ Usage of social networks

- ▶ If Facebook were a country it would be the 3rd largest
- ▶ 96% of the millenials have joined a social network
- ▶ 75% of recruitment companies use Linked In

▶ Volume of online communities

- ▶ 80 million Farmville Farmers
- ▶ Britney Spears has more followers than the entire population of Ireland

▶ Sales in online communities

- ▶ Social gamers will buy \$6 billion in virtual goods by 2013 vs movie goers by only \$2,5 billion real goods

▶ EWOM through online communities

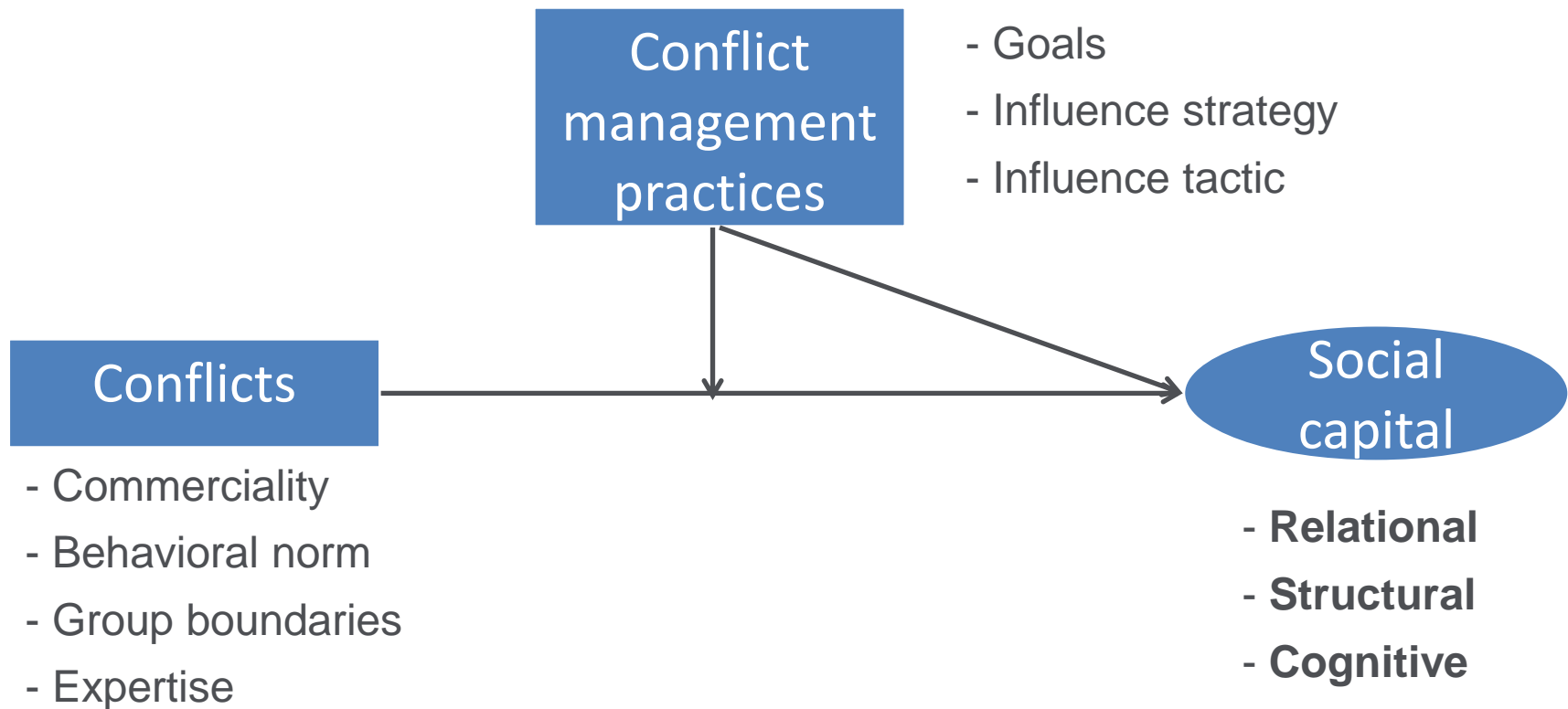
- ▶ There are over 200 million bloggs and 34% of bloggers post opinions about products and brands
- ▶ 25% of search results for the World's Top 20 largest brands link to user-generated content

▶ 78% of people trust peer recommendation vs 14% trusting advertising

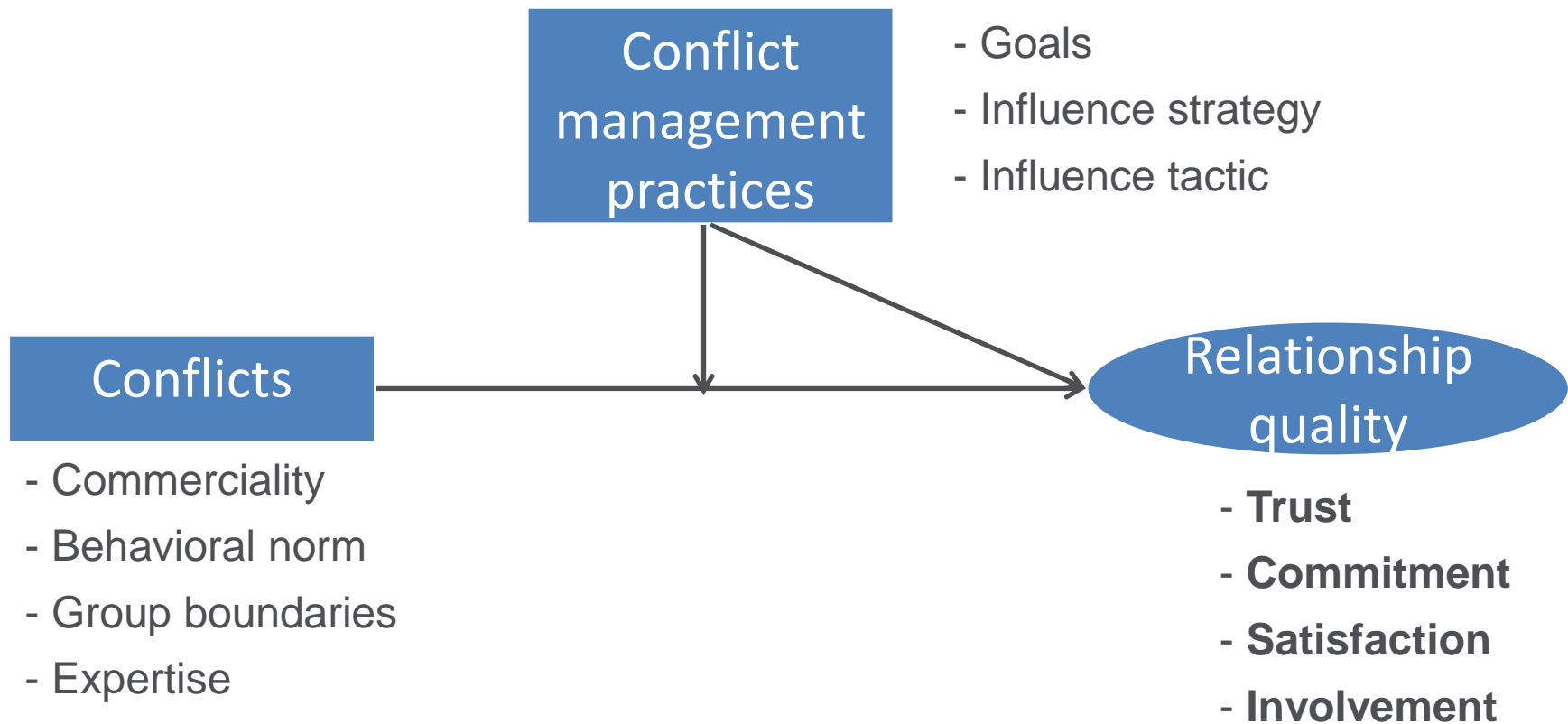
Sampling procedure

- ▶ **Presence of a critical mass of communicators**
 - ▶ a certain number of communicators publishing regularly
 - ▶ a regular flow of communication between participants
- ▶ **Data rich interactions:** abundant, detailed descriptive member generated contributions
- ▶ **Variety of members**
 - ▶ Presence of moderators
 - ▶ Various types members
 - ▶ Presence of highly involved members
- ▶ **Has been in existence for some time**
- ▶ **Marketing relevant**

Analytical framework – community level



Analytical framework – individual level



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