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Firm-Sponsored Online Communities: Building Alignment Capabilities for Participatory Governance

Firm-sponsored online communities face governance challenges due to differences in organizing logics, goals, and values between the community and the sponsor. This study focuses on better understanding the successful governance of firm-sponsored online communities. Through an inductive case study of Mayo Clinic Connect, an online patient community sponsored by Mayo Clinic, we find that successfully governing these communities requires developing participatory governance capabilities. Prior work highlights the importance of a participatory governance system that enlists firm and community stakeholders. Our findings extend this prior work to reveal how a firm sponsored online community builds capabilities to align firm-based and community-based governance through two types of mechanisms: informalizing the formal and formalizing the informal. In turn, we unpack multiple practices that implement these mechanisms. In the context of the literature on firm-sponsored online communities, our findings emphasize how governance alignment enables these communities to balance the legitimacy of their governance systems from the community’s perspective with their effectiveness from the firm’s perspective. For the upstream governance literature, these alignment capabilities broaden governance from a static structure to a dynamic system that adapts to stakeholders' evolving needs and interests.

About the Speaker

Dr. Hani Safadi is Associate professor at Terry College of Business, University of Georgia. He is interested in online communities, social media, health IT, information systems development, and the application of computational techniques in management research. His research is published in outlets such as MIS Quarterly where he serves as Associate Editor, Information Systems Research, Organization Science, Journal of the Association for Information Systems, and Journal of Medical Internet Research.