Facebook in the Developing World: The Myths and Realities Underlying a Socially Networked World

Abstract
The BBC, New York Times and other media channels are abuzz with reports about Mark Zuckerberg’s desire to connect everyone on the planet through social media. Missing from these online articles are reports of the realities “bottom of the pyramid” users in developing countries encounter when trying to access Facebook. This panel brings together researchers who have studied use of the popular social media site in Kenya, Namibia, Zambia, India, Mexico and the United States to discuss the opportunities and challenges that accompany adding 4 billion new users to Facebook. Our primary goal is to provide the CSCW community with an understanding of obstacles, such as persistent poverty and lack of electricity, low-income users encounter when attempting to use the site. This knowledge will help CSCW researchers think more broadly and realistically about the contexts for which they are studying and designing collaborative systems.

Author Keywords
Social media, Facebook, ICTD and HCI4D

ACM Classification Keywords
H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.
Introduction
Facebook is a global phenomenon, yet little is known about its use in the developing world where the social network’s users are increasingly located. In this panel, we will focus on a subset of current and potential users broadly described as the “bottom of the pyramid,” or the roughly 4 billion people who live on less than US$2 per day. This population’s social, economic, and technical contexts differ from more affluent and tech-savvy user groups that social media scholars typically study. Our panelists will draw from their fieldwork experiences in five different countries where social media use is expected to grow. They will describe how the costs of using the Internet, gender inequality, poor technical infrastructure, and other obstacles will complicate Zuckerberg’s effort to digitally connect the world. We will also discuss other initiatives meant to greatly expand social media use in the developing world, including “Facebook for Every Phone,” or the company’s efforts to develop a mobile version of Facebook for the feature phones widely used in developing regions.

Facebook, and other social media sites such as Twitter, are at the leading edge of a set of issues that relate to other sociotechnical systems that are attempting to find a place in the developing world. For example, Wikipedia has focused for the last several years on expanding access to the ability for users in the developing world to add information to that site.

This panel promises lively debates between those with a utopian vision of a socially connected world and those with concerns about technology’s role in aggravating existing inequalities between developed and developing countries. This panel will also stimulate discussion on how CSCW researchers can contribute to our understanding of the myths and realities underlying a socially networked world. This knowledge not only has implications for social media research but other topics of interest within the community, such as crowdsourcing.

Panel Structure
Susan Wyche will moderate the 1½ hour-long session. She will begin by introducing the topic and each panelist. Then panelists will make a three-minute presentation describing their social media research (20 minutes). We will ask members of the audience to ask questions following presentations (15 minutes).

Wyche will then ask the following questions to panelists and encourage them to draw from their research experience when answering them (35 minutes).

- Why study Facebook use in so-called developing countries?
- How are global technologies converging and being adapted by bottom of the pyramid users?
- Can social media be used to address problems associated with the various common sub-fields within economic development (e.g., education, health, governance, livelihoods, etc.)?
- How do disparities between men’s and women’s access to ICT in the developing world shape Facebook’s growth in developing regions?
- How do you conduct social media research in developing countries? What are the

**Panelists**

**Social Media Scholar:**
Cliff Lampe

**Facebook employee:**
Judd Antin

**Researchers working in the field (country or countries where they have conducted fieldwork):**
Susan Wyche (Kenya and Zambia)
Nimmi Rangaswamy (India)
Anicia Peters (Namibia)
Andrés Monroy-Hernández (Mexico)
methodological, ethical and operational issues of studying social media in a developing context as opposed to anywhere else.

We will use the final 20 minutes to answer questions from the audience and to discuss how the CSCW research community can move forward in their understanding of this topic.

**Technical Requirements**
We will require a screen, projector and six microphones during the panel. We also request two microphones for audience members to use when asking questions.

**Expected Outcomes**
This panel is a first step in building a community of researchers interested in studying this topic. Following the conference we will write an article for ACM *interactions* that summarizes discussions from the panel.

**Meet the panelists**
The six panelist organizers for the workshop have extensive research experience in Information Communication Technology and Development (ICTD), CSCW and HCI. They are a mix of faculty, industry researchers and advanced graduate students. Collectively they have studied social media use on 3 continents. Panelists represent a range of academic disciplines including design, information studies, and anthropology. All of the invited panelists have confirmed their willingness to participate.

**Susan Wyche** is an Assistant Professor in the Dept. of Telecommunication, Information Studies, and Media at Michigan State University. Her current research interests include mobile phone and social media use in rural and urban Kenya. Grants from the CRA/NSF Computing Innovation Fellows Project, Google, Facebook and Nokia support this research. She earned her Ph.D. in Human-Centered Computing from Georgia Tech in 2010.

**Cliff Lampe** is an Associate Professor in the School of Information at the University of Michigan. Previously, he was also in the College of Communication Arts and Sciences at Michigan State University. In his research, he focuses on how social and technical systems interact to enable people to collaborate, particularly around collective action efforts. In his research, he has worked with sites like Slashdot, Wilkipedia, Everything2, SourceForge and Facebook. In addition, he has done work creating online communities in coordination with public sector groups.

**Nimmi Rangaswamy** is currently adjunct professor at the Indian institute of Technology, Hyderabad. Previously, she worked at Microsoft Research where she combined theoretical analysis and ethnographic field research to understand technology use in developing countries. These are studies of patterns of technology adoption in various social contexts and spaces in India, ranging from middle class consumption of domestic media, the business models of cyber cafés and the use of mobile Internet and Facebook among urban slum youth.

**Anicia Peters** is a PhD candidate in Human Computer Interaction at Iowa State University. She is also a Lecturer at the Polytechnic of Namibia. Her research interests focus on decision-making and digital signage, as well as cross-cultural social media research. She
studies in particular cross-cultural influences and usage of Facebook in the United States and Namibia.

Andrés Monroy-Hernández is a social computing researcher at Microsoft Research. His recent work investigates the use of social media in the Mexican Drug War, and in political uprisings Latin America. Also, along with his colleagues, he is developing a suite of hyperlocal civic media applications. He was named one of the TR35 innovators by the MIT Tech Review in Spanish, and one of the most influential Latinos in tech by CNET. He holds a PhD in from the MIT Media Lab, where he created the Scratch Online Community.

Judd Antin is a User Experience Researcher at Facebook. Judd’s areas of expertise include incentives and motivation for online collaboration, "gamification" and game mechanics, online communities, collective action and social dilemmas, as well as trust, reliability, and credibility. His research interests center on user-generated content, social media, the wisdom of crowds, distributed work, and all other forms of online collaboration.