

Technology and Community Behavior in Online Environments

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Abstract. Two literatures on virtual communities coexist with little overlap: the “communities” literature, which focuses on social and psychological processes, and the “environments” literature, which focuses on the technology used by members of online communities. The purpose of this paper is to build a case for drawing these two literatures together through a review of relevant literature and a comparison of four virtual communities that target the same membership but differ dramatically in technological features. The findings provide preliminary support for the hypothesis that the technological features of online environments are linked to the social processes observed in them. Environmental or ecological psychology offers a promising framework for the theoretical integration of the two literatures on virtual communities.