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Track 15: Social Virtual Worlds

Track Co-Chairs

Moez Limayem, mlimayem@walton.uark.edu

University of Arkansas, USA

Imed Boughzala, imed.boughzala@it-sudparis.eu

National Institute of Telecommunications (*INT*), France

Introduction

In his famous science-fiction novel *Snow Crash*, Neal Stephenson envisioned the evolution of the Internet into what he called a “Metaverse”, a three dimensional (3D) virtual reality (VR)-based space where people interacted and communicated with each other through their avatars (*i.e.* graphical representation of themselves).

This is a far cry from the early text-based environments, such as Multi-User Domains (MUDs) and MUD-object oriented (MOOs) in which users were represented by a single character. Virtual worlds have since evolved into sophisticated 3D interactive systems, such as Massively-Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs), where millions of people chat, cooperate and compete with each other through their avatars.

Beyond the entertainment and game play features, virtual worlds are evolving towards Stephenson’s concept of metaverse, where social and economic interactions are the main drivers. Currently one of the best examples of this evolution is Second Life (SL), a social virtual world (SVW) where people (called *residents*) can communicate, collaborate, and buy and sell not only virtual goods and services (*e.g.* clothes, real-estate), but also real products (*e.g.* Dell computers) through their customized virtual spaces and avatars.

Unlike most prior virtual worlds in which content was designed and managed by software specialists, developers of SL added an important feature: enabling users to build and personalize their avatars, private virtual spaces (lands), and objects (houses, clothes, *etc.*), through a powerful and easy-to-use interface. Furthermore, in addition to text-based chatting and instant messaging, SL developers recently added voice communication capabilities, are opening interesting opportunities for learning and training applications.

SL’s population has grown from 2 million in December 2006 to 9 million residents today. About half a million users use SL regularly [11]. Interestingly, more than a million dollars are spent by residents every month. This world may be virtual, but the money is real. Current business transactions are performed in a virtual economy, allowing users to convert real money into a virtual currency, indexed by an exchange market managed by the developer’s online platform. In other words, one can buy and sell virtual money at any time. Moreover, well-known companies and banks are going “in-world” (*i.e.* inside SL) to advertise, and eventually sell, real products and services, by building SL stores or putting a link inside SL to their traditional websites. Similarly, universities and educators are setting up lectures and classes in SL. Recently, the Swedish government announced the opening of an official

representation in SL. French politicians are promoting their presidential campaigns “in-world”.

The objectives of the track are to encourage discussion and dissemination of research on Social Virtual leading to the development of new research theories, methodologies, models and applications. Theoretical, empirical, experimental, case studies and panel contributions in the form of both full papers but also short research-in-progress papers are welcome.

Suggested topics (a non-exhaustive list):

- Use of SVW
- Business Models in SVW
- Impact of SVW on organizational performance
- Meetings in SVW
- Education and SVW
- Research Methods in SVW
- Design impact on SVW usage
- Strategy in SVW
- Business in SVW
- Privacy and Trust in SVW
- Conflict between real and SVW
- Culture and SVW

BIOS of track co-chairs

Dr. Moez Limayem

Dr. Moez Limayem is the Walton Professor and Chair of the Information Systems Department at the Sam M. Walton College of Business, University of Arkansas. He holds an MBA and a Ph.D. in Management Information Systems from the University of Minnesota. His current research interests include IT adoption and usage in Education, Customer Relationship Management, Knowledge Management and Social Virtual Worlds. He has had several articles published or forthcoming in many journals such as MIS Quarterly, Management Science, Information Systems Research, Communications of the ACM, Journal of AIS, IEEE Transactions, Accounting, Management & Information technologies, Group Decision and Negotiation, and Small Group Research. Dr Limayem is on the editorial board of several important journals such MIS Quarterly. He won the best MIS paper award at the ASAC conference in 1998 and at the ICIS conference in 2003. Dr Limayem is the current elected president of the Association of Information and Management. He is also the program co-chair for ICIS 2008 and the chair of the AIM 2007 conference.

In 1994, Professor Limayem won the prestigious HERMES award for excellence in teaching. In 1995 and 1998, he won the award for the best MIS teacher in the Faculty of Business Administration at Laval University and more recently, he received the 3M award of the best teacher in Canada. In November 2001, he won the Teaching Excellence Award at City University of Hong Kong. In January 2003 and October 2004, he received the best teacher award of the Information Systems Department at City University of Hong Kong.

Dr. Limayem has more than 15 years of experience in executive training in the USA, Canada, Hong Kong and several European countries. He is the highest rated

Executive MBA instructor at City University of HK, Concordia University (Montreal Canada), and at Laval University (Quebec, Canada). Dr. Limayem also acts as a consultant for the UNESCO and several private and public companies. His consultancy services cover e-Government, e-Commerce, Business Process Reengineering and Customer Relationship Management.

Dr. Imed Boughzala

Dr. Imed Boughzala is Associate Professor at the Department of Information Systems at the National Institute of Telecommunications in France. He received two MScs in Management and in Computer Science from Paris IX Dauphine University, and a PhD in Computer and Information Systems from Paris VI Pierre & Marie Curie University. Prior to joining the IT Sud Paris in September 2002, he was Assistant Professor at the University of Technology of Troyes (UTT) and before, he managed several IT and KM projects on behalf of several companies as France Telecom, Andersen consulting, Bureau VERITAS, Société Générale Bank, etc. Since 2006, he is the executive vice-president of the French Knowledge Management Club, an association of industrial companies.

His research's interests include topics and issues related to Virtual collaboration, and Knowledge Engineering and Management. As part of his research and consulting missions, he is working with several companies (SNCF, Radio France, Volvo, Hydro Quebec, etc.) as expert in knowledge mapping and modeling techniques, and facilitator for Collaborative Virtual Projects. He teaches Information System Design, e-business/e-commerce (CRM, SCM, BI, ERP...), Virtual Project Management, Knowledge Engineering/Management and CSCW (Computer Supported Cooperative Work). Since these two years, he is experimenting the V-learning through virtual worlds such as Second Life. From September 2003 to July 2006, he was the program director of the MSc in Information Technology.

He is author of several articles published in national and international reviews and conferences. He is editor and author of several books on Knowledge Management, e-Government and Collaboration Engineering. His last one was on KM 2.0 published by Vuibert in March 2008.

After being Visiting Scholar at Brunel West London University (United Kingdom) in the spring 2008 semester, Imed Boughzala is currently Visiting Scholar at the University of Arkansas (USA) for the fall 2008 semester.