Men at work: the StackOverflow case

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ABSTRACT

Online communities are flourishing as social meeting web-spaces for users and peer community members. Different online communities require different levels of competence for participants to join, and scattered evidence suggests that the female gender and minorities can be under-represented.

Here we focus on the popular programming-related Q&A website StackOverflow. StackOverflow is based on earning prizes, reputation and badges, that allow participants to access new features and gain more control on others' postings. Anecdotal evidence around it suggests that StackOverflow strongly promotes oneupmanship and fosters flame-wars and the down-voting of individuals. Discussions on meta StackOverflow suggest that this results in a lesser participation by female users, who do not engage with the community or use gender-neutral names to be accepted by the mostly male audiences [1]. To verify these claims empirical evidence is needed on whether women participate "less than" men, as well as "differently from" men.

Using a gender-inference mechanism based on a user's name and location on the one hand (e.g., to distinguish between Andrea as a typically-male first name in Italy and typically-female in Germany), and their profile pictures on the other hand, we distinguish between the individuals presenting themselves as men (i.e., using masculine names and pictures), those presenting themselves as women and those for whom we could not identify their gender [2].

BODY

StackOverflow users presenting themselves as women participate less and earn less reputation than those presenting themselves as men.

REFERENCES

[1] Meta StackOverflow community. What can Stack Overflow do to persuade female programmers to participate more?, 2009. http://meta.stackoverflow.com/questions/30411/what-can-stack-overflow-do-to-persuade-female-programmers-to-participate-more.

[2] B. Vasilescu, A. Capiluppi, and A. Serebrenik. Gender, representation and online participation: A quantitative study of StackOverflow. In *Proceedings of the 2012 ASE International Conference on Social Informatics*. ASE, 2012.