Introduction

- With a growing body of literature addressing the design and management of online communities and data curation, there are only few studies of the dynamics and lifecycle of online knowledge curation communities, and social Q&A communities in particular.
- This poster presents a part of a larger study which examines the knowledge curation work organization and dynamics in Stack Exchange social Q&A communities.
- In particular, the poster presents the analysis of the work organization and dynamics of a short-lived social Q&A community which lasted only 30 weeks, from its inception to closing.
- Immediate future work includes comparing a successful Q&A community’s repertoires of activity strategies, patterns and dynamics to the findings reported here.

Research Questions

- What were some of the actions used in community building, maintenance, and knowledge curation activities?
- What were some of the strategies used in those activities?
- What were the temporal distributions of those actions and related discussions throughout the community’s lifecycle?

The Stack Exchange Staging Zone (Area 51)

- Anyone can propose a new Q&A site (called a proposal) in Area 51, but reaching out to other experts and defining the type of questions that are wanted is a community-driven process.
- A proposed Q&A site need to go through four phases before it official launched: Definition, Commitment, Private Beta, and Public Beta.
- A proposed Q&A site can be closed if it fails to meet the criteria set for each phase by Stack Exchange.

• Have enough potential users
• Have a clear defined site scope
• Have enough committers agree to participate in beta phase
• Only committers can join
• Have community building activities at the appropriate level
• Meta site opens at this phase
• Open to public
• Have a large core group
• Have sustainable growth in community development

Data and Methods

- Data used in this poster was collected from one of the closed Q&A sites at Stack Exchange called Economics.
- The Economics site successfully passed the definition, commitment, and private beta phases, but failed to be launched and was closed by Stack Exchange after staying in public beta phase for 206 days.
- The final dataset used in this study includes:
  - Data from Economics main site (topic specific question-answering threads): 1,007 question-answering threads with and 38 action type codes (3,284 instances) defined and assigned by Stack Exchange software.
  - Data from Economics meta site (site management discussion threads): 166 site management discussion entries.
  - Site management discussion entries from meta site were manually coded into 13 categories (417 instances).

Findings and Discussion

• Descriptive time series statistics for 30 weeks for both the twelve meta discussion categories and 38 action type codes in main site were generated.

Community Building Discussion

The most frequently occurring discussion categories were discussions about the site’s scope definition, community governance, and work organization. The community also grappled with community developing strategies for various purposes (see Fig. 2).

Ongoing debates remained both in the private beta and the public beta phases about whether to restrict the scope of the site to high level, graduate questions (to recruit and retain experts) or allow lay, normative type questions as well (to increase the traffic to the site).

Community Building Action

Community members did fair amount quality assurance work by actively revising submitted questions and answers during the first 11 weeks (see Fig.3). In week 12, however, the frequency of that activity experienced a sharp decline. Another decline of the question and answer revision activity occurred in week 21, right before when a trolling attack was discovered and a decision was made by Stack Exchange to close the site.

Figures:
- Figure 1. Criteria used by Stack Exchange to evaluate Q&A site status.
- Figure 2. Temporal distribution of member discussion categories in meta site.
- Figure 3. Temporal distribution of content creation and curation actions in main site (the 10 most frequently occurred actions are included).