

Research explores dynamics of online networking

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Birds of a feather flock together, in cyberspace.

At least that's what Dr. Cuihua (Cindy) Shen, assistant professor of Emerging Media and Communication at UT Dallas, has shown in a research article published in the journal *First Monday*.

Examining an online community using social network analysis, Shen tested the social drivers that shaped the collaboration dynamics among a group of users from SourceForge, the largest [open source](#) community on the Web.

[Who Connects with Whom? A Social Network Analysis of an Online Open Source Software Community](#) co-written by Peter Monge shows that users in online communities choose which users to interact with, and that their choices reveal the motivations and processes that create collective networks.

“Taken together, we found that accomplished developers tend to connect with other accomplished developers, essentially forming an elitist circle in the OSS (open source [software](#)) community. By contrast, it is more difficult for less successful developers to establish collaborative relations, and even if they do, they tend to connect with others who have a similar lower level of performance and experience,” Shen writes in the article.

OSS refers to computer software products that permit users to study,

change, improve and re-distribute the software. This process is different from the traditional and proprietary model of software development, and it allows developers to establish social relations by collaborating in software project teams.

“Developers who are working or have worked on the same project are linked to each other thereby creating collaboration networks,” Shen said of OSS communities.

“By conceptualizing an online community as a network of participants and examining the formation of social ties, this research demonstrates that social network analysis can be a useful approach to studying the dynamics of online social systems.”

Shen hopes the article will lead to new discoveries in her field: “Testing and comparing network formation mechanisms in online social networks across different domains will open new avenues for understanding the social and collaborative dynamics in contemporary networked media environments.”

Provided by University of Texas at Dallas

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