If you build it, will they come?

Practices, technology, and the value proposition of online civic engagement

Dmitry Epstein

www.thinkmacro.org
@Think_Macro

UIC UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT CHICAGO

March 25, 2016

Context

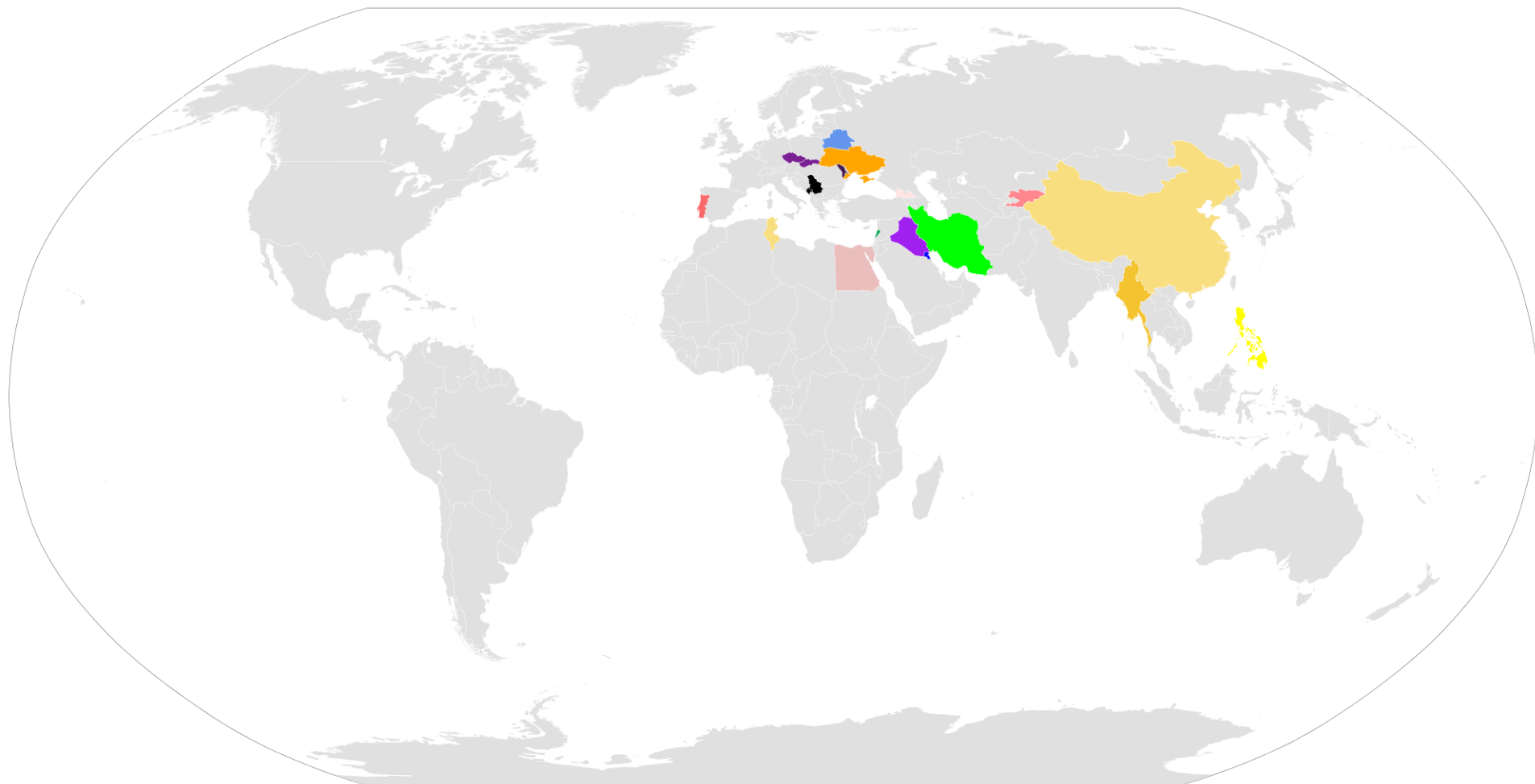# Practices

Technology

Value proposition

Context

- **48% of adults directly took part in a civic group or activity**

- **39% of adults recently contacted a government official or spoke out in a public forum via offline methods**

- **34% did those things via online methods**

- **39% of adults do political or civic activities on social networking sites.**

Political engagement on social networking sites

60% of American adults use social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter; these are some of the civic behaviors they have taken part in on these sites:

	% of SNS users who have done this	% of all adults who have done this
"Like" or promote material related to political/social issues that others have posted	38%	23%
Encourage other people to vote	35	21
Post your own thoughts/comments on political or social issues	34	20
Repost content related to political/social issues	33	19
Encourage others to take action on political/social issues that are important to you	31	19
Post links to political stories or articles for others to read	28	17
Belong to a group that is involved in political/social issues, or working to advance a cause	21	12
Follow elected officials, candidates for office or other public figures	20	12
Total who said yes to any of the activities listed above	**66%**	**39%**

Rulemaking

Congress

Agency

Law → Draft rule → Public comment → Final rule

NET
NEUTRALITY

Congress

Agency

Law → Draft rule → Public comment → Final rule

~4,000 rules a year

e-Rulemaking

- Old-school rulemaking
  Hard copy Federal Register; paper dockets; readings rooms

- e-Rulemaking 1.0
  Federal Register online; e-dockets; Regulations.gov

regulations.gov
Your Voice in Federal Decision-Making

SHARE

Begin a search by choosing a task or entering a keyword

search for
a proposed rule

submit
a comment

read
comments

search for
a final rule

President's Executive Order 13563

Learn more about Improving Regulations and Regulatory Review

1 2 3 4

Select Document Type:

Enter Keyword or ID:

☐ Open for Comment/Submission
☐ View results by docket folder

Search

» Advanced Search
» Browse By Topic

What's Hot
Most Visited Regulations

Your Voice In Action
Site Data

Regulations with
Comment Periods
Closing Soon

Newly Posted
Regulations

EO 13563 &
Regulatory Resources

e-Rulemaking

- Old-school rulemaking
  Hard copy Federal Register; paper dockets; readings rooms

- e-Rulemaking 1.0
  Federal Register online; e-dockets; Regulations.gov

- e-Rulemaking 2.0?
  Use of Web 2.0 technologies (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, blogs, discussion forums, collaborative content creation, etc.)

Rule	Days open	Visitors	Registered users	Total comments	Commenting users
Texting	34	1,999	54	32	18
Airline Passenger Rights	110	19,320	1,189	931	348
Electronic On Board Recorders	106	5,328	104	235	68
Accessibility	112	7,949	53	103	31
Home Mortgage	60	8,908	144	236	144
Debt Collection	115	8,480	377	956	224

Practices

Epstein, D. and Leshed, G. (under review). The magic sauce: Practices of facilitation in online policy deliberation.

Epstein, D., Newhart, M. J., and Vernon, R. (2014). Not by technology alone: The "analog" aspects of online public engagement in rulemaking. *Government Information Quarterly*, 31(2), 337-344.

Farina, C. R., Epstein, D., Heidt, J., and Newhart, M. J. (2013). Regulation Room: Getting "more, better" civic participation in complex government policymaking. *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy*, 7(4), 501-516.

- **Motivation**
  Awareness, buy-in, process transparency

- **Skills**
  Technical skills, process skills

- **Culture**
  Voting, community of practice, language

- **Cost**
  For participants, for the agency
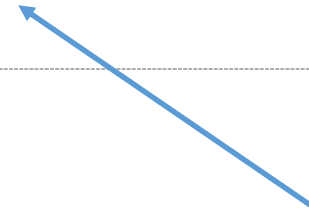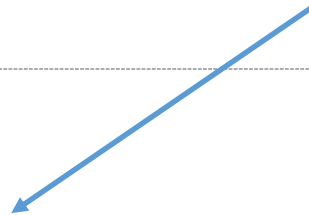
Congress

Agency

Law → Draft rule → Public comment → Final rule

"Translation" → Outreach → Moderated discussion → Summary

Regulation Room™

Open Rule

Consumer Debt Collection Practices (ANPRM)

Summary ▾

Discussion | **Unlawful collection practices**

- 193 💬

Select other topics ▼

Subtopics

collapse all ▲   expand all ▼

1 | Harassment or abuse - 113 💬   ▲

Agency Proposal

The Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA) is supposed to "eliminate abusive debt collection practices by debt collectors." The FDCPA spells out things that would illegally "harass, oppress or abuse" consumers (FDCPA § 806). Some of these are discussed in other topic posts:

- Publishing the name of a consumer who allegedly refuses to pay his/her debts. See Questions about email, texting & social media in debt collection—Using social media?
- Calling repeatedly or continuously with intent to annoy, abuse, or harass someone: See Questions about phones & mobile phones in debt collection—Repetitive calls and robo-calls.
- Calling without disclosing the caller's identity: See Questions about phones & mobile phones in debt collection—Voicemail & answering machine messages and Caller ID.

Here are 3 others:

Comments 113 💬   ♥

Make a comment.

+ Link   **Comment**   Cancel

Dannyea
November 6, 2013 - 8:40pm

25

My homeless brother in San Diego was taken to the hospital by a local ambulance service. On the way, they ask for a person to contact, with an address or phone number. Now the collection agency is calling MY phone number. They are saying I owe money to this ambulance service.

Agency Proposal

The Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA) is supposed to "eliminate abusive debt collection practices by debt collectors." The FDCPA spells out things that would illegally "harass, oppress or abuse" consumers (FDCPA § 806). Some of these are discussed in other topic posts:

- Publishing the name of a consumer who allegedly refuses to pay his/her debts. See Questions about email, texting & social media in debt collection—Using social media?
- Calling repeatedly or continuously with intent to annoy, abuse, or harass someone: See Questions about phones & mobile phones in debt collection—Repetitive calls and robo-calls.
- Calling without disclosing the caller's identity: See Questions about phones & mobile phones in debt collection—Voicemail & answering machine messages and Caller ID.

Here are 3 others:

1. Advertising a debt for sale to coerce the consumer to pay it.
2. Using or threatening violence (or other criminal means) to harm a person, or their reputation or property.
3. Using obscene or profane language, or other language that has "the natural consequence" of abusing someone hearing or reading it.

Is there anything about these 3 that a new federal rule should make clearer, or add to?

The FDCPA says that there might be other practices that "harass, oppress or abuse" consumers. Is there any other kind of conduct by collectors that new federal rules should list as harassment or abuse? How often does this conduct happen?

Read what CFPB said in the ANPRM about *Abusive Conduct*.

Comments 113 💬 💙

> Make a comment.

+ Link   **Comment**   Cancel

Dannyea
November 6, 2013 - 8:40pm

My homeless brother in San Diego was taken to the hospital by a local ambulance service. On the way, they ask for a person to contact, with an address or phone number. Now the collection agency is calling MY phone number. They are saying I owe money to this ambulance service. They know it is a lie, but they will still keep trying to collect on this debt, and harassing me in the process.

↪   Endorse   Reply

↳ Moderator
November 17, 2013 - 7:24pm

Thank you for sharing your story Dannyea. Filing complaint's with no documentary proof is raised below in Substantiating claims (below) and is part of what's at stake in Documentation (Making sure debt collectors and buyers have info about the debt). We hope you will let CFPB know what new rules would have helped your situation.

2 | Communicating with a consumer who has an attorney - 6 💬 ▼

3 | Payment methods, post-dated checks, and how payments are applied - 12 💬 ▼

4 | False or misleading conduct - 42 💬 ▼

How often does this conduct happen?

Read what CFPB said in the ANPRM about *Abusive Conduct*.

2 | Communicating with a consumer who has an attorney - 6 💬

3 | Payment methods, post-dated checks, and how payments are applied - 12 💬

4 | False or misleading conduct - 42 💬

5 | People who provide services and assistance to debt collectors - 7 💬

6 | Substantiating claims about the debt and the effects of payment on credit - 13 💬

All topics

COMMENT ON

<

Telling consumers what's happening with their debts
124 💬 6 🖤

The "validation notice" sent to consumers
104 💬 7 🖤

When consumers dispute a debt
133 💬 3 🖤

Making sure debt collectors & buyers have info about the debt
41 💬 2 🖤

>

About

FAQ

Contact Us

Terms of Use & Privacy

Twitter

Facebook

👍 Like 454

powered by **Smart Participation**™

The Research

- **Consultation of Consumer Debt Collection Practices Proposal (115 days)**

- **8,480 unique visitors (12,629 total visits, 377 registered as users)**

- **956 comments by 224 commenters**

- **Moderators posted a total of 250 responses**

- **Semi structured interviews combined with the "think aloud" protocol**

- **Interviewed eight moderators (2 females, 6 males; 52 minutes on average)**

quality of comments

vs.

community building

Technology

McInnis, B., Murnane, E., Epstein, D., Cosely, D., and Leshed, G. (2016). One and Done: Factors affecting one-time contributors to ad-hoc online communities. *Proceedings of CSCW 2016*, 609-623, San Francisco, CA.

Farina, C. R., Epstein, D., Heidt, J., and Newhart, M. J. (2014). Designing an online civic engagement platform: Balancing "more" vs. "better" participation in complex public policymaking. *International Journal of E-Politics*, 5(1), 16-40.

Agency Proposal

The Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA) is supposed to "eliminate abusive debt collection practices by debt collectors." The FDCPA spells out things that would illegally "harass, oppress or abuse" consumers (FDCPA § 806). Some of these are discussed in other topic posts:

- Publishing the name of a consumer who allegedly refuses to pay his/her debts. See Questions about email, texting & social media in debt collection—Using social media?
- Calling repeatedly or continuously with intent to annoy, abuse, or harass someone: See Questions about phones & mobile phones in debt collection—Repetitive calls and robo-calls.
- Calling without disclosing the caller's identity: See Questions about phones & mobile phones in debt collection—Voicemail & answering machine messages and Caller ID.

Here are 3 others:

1. Advertising a debt for sale to coerce the consumer to pay it.
2. Using or threatening violence (or other criminal means) to harm a person, or their reputation or property.
3. Using obscene or profane language, or other language that has "the natural consequence" of abusing someone hearing or reading it.

Is there anything about these 3 that a new federal rule should make clearer, or add to?

The FDCPA says that there might be other practices that "harass, oppress or abuse" consumers. Is there any other kind of conduct by collectors that new federal rules should list as harassment or abuse? How often does this conduct happen?

Read what CFPB said in the ANPRM about Abusive Conduct*.*

Comments 113 💬   ♥

```
Make a comment.



```
+ Link   **Comment**   Cancel

Dannyea
November 6, 2013 - 8:40pm

My homeless brother in San Diego was taken to the hospital by a local ambulance service. On the way, they ask for a person to contact, with an address or phone number. Now the collection agency is calling MY phone number. They are saying I owe money to this ambulance service. They know it is a lie, but they will still keep trying to collect on this debt, and harassing me in the process.

25

↪   Endorse   Reply

↪ Moderator
November 17, 2013 - 7:24pm

26

Thank you for sharing your story Dannyea. Filing complaint's with no documentary proof is raised below in Substantiating claims (below) and is part of what's at stake in Documentation (Making sure debt collectors and buyers have info about the debt). We hope you will let CFPB know what new rules would have helped your situation.

**2 | Communicating with a consumer who has an attorney - 6** 💬   ▼

3 | Payment methods, post-dated checks, and how payments are applied - 12 💬   ▼

4 | False or misleading conduct - 42 💬   ▼

- 2/3 of visitors are one timers

- they contribute over 1/3 of all comments

- ~40% of participants post just one comment

- 1/3 of commenters who receive moderator feedback came back to post again

- contributors' median visit duration was one day
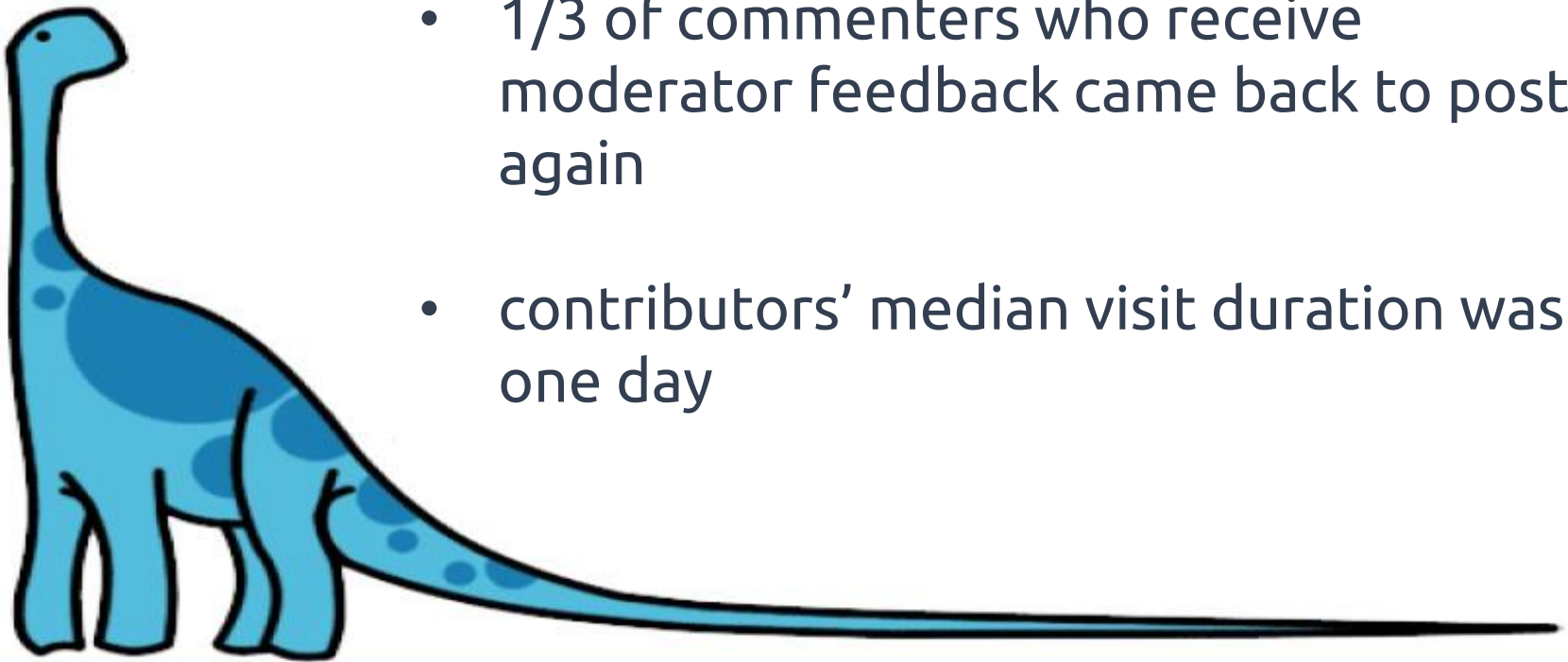
The Research

- A "UI experience" study on AMT limited to US-based Turkers

- Discussed AMT Participation Agreement

- 549 accepted and 329 completed HITs
1092 total and 897 completed comments

- Baseline measures, engagement, exit measures

- Comments coded for responsiveness

When HITS are rejected

The mTurk Participation Agreement sets up two options for what happens when a HIT is completed: (1) the Requester approves the work, and mTurk automatically processes a payment to the Turker; or (2) the Requester rejects the work, and the Turker gets nothing. All the Agreement says about rejection is that the Requester can reject 'if the Sevices do not meet the Requester's reasonable satisfaction.'

Some Turkers worry that Requesters have no accountability for rejecting work on HITs. Rejection not only keeps Turkers from getting paid for their work but also damages their approval rating. Yet Requesters aren't required to respond to Turkers' questions,and Turkers have no way to appealing rejections. From Requesters' point of view, payment is the only leverage they have to insure the quality of work. And, since a Requester is typically requesting and reviewing a large number of HITs, having to answer questions from individual Turkers could become a huge burden.

Should there be clearer standards, or some more formal process, for rejecting HITS?

Should Turkers receive partial payment for rejected HITs?

If so, how would that amount be set?

Comments 4 💬

Make a Comment

[Comment] [Cancel]

4:07 PM August 13, 2014

I feel that the requester should communicate more with the turker, if there was a rejection. I agree with the partial payment, I feel there should be some kind of compensation given for the time spent on certain types of hits.

[Reply]

user@7e4reG1
4:06 PM August 13, 2014

2

There should be partial payment. I had a HIT rejected once because it was 10 words under what the paragraph needed to be. I spent alot of time on it but I assumed I had enough characters but I didnt and I got no payment.

H1a: Participants who are more strongly connected to other Turkers will be "better contributors" (i.e., make more, longer, and more responsive contributions).

H1b: Participants who have higher trust in AMT will be better contributors.

H1c: Participants with a higher sense of self-efficacy will be better contributors.

~~H2a. Participants who see a default text prompt that describes the overall goals of a comment will make more and longer contributions than those who see a generic prompt.~~

~~H2b. Participants who see a default text prompt with a specific request will make comments that are more responsive to the request than those who see a generic prompt.~~

H3a: Participants who enter a site with more pre-existing content will contribute more and longer comments.

H3b: Participants who see more synchronously added content will contribute more and longer comments.

H3c: Participants' comments will tend to be more or less responsive when they see more or less responsive comments.

Value
proposition

Bridging the knowledge gap: Conceptualizing situated knowledge in online public policy deliberation (in preparation with Tzabari-Baram, A., Orr, D., and Laslo, E.)

Epstein, D., Heidt, J., and Farina, C. R. (2014) The value of words: Narrative as evidence in policymaking. *Evidence and Policy*, 10(2), 243-258.

Farina, C. R., Epstein, D., Heidt, J. and Newhart, M. J. (2012). Knowledge in the people: Rethinking "value" in public rulemaking participation. *Wake Forest Law Review*, 47(5), 1185-1241.

Public as an outsider

- Type of evidence:
  "objective" vs. contextualized and experiential

- Form of argumentation:
  analytical reasoning vs. personal stories
  substantiation vs. lack of substantiation

The Research

1. Identify the narrative segments within each Regulation Room public comment.

2. Differentiate between *substantiated* and *unsubstantiated* claims.

3. Classify each narrative segment according to the type of knowledge it relates—*declarative*, *procedural*, or *schematic*.

4. Determine which of the narratives are actually relevant to the discussion and, as such, should be surfaced to the decision-makers.

5. Develop computation, NLP-based tools for automatic identification of substantiation and situated knowledge.

From formal to situated knowledge

Formal	DECLARATIVE Knowing "that"	PROCEDURAL Knowing "how"	SCHEMATIC Knowing "why"	STRATEGIC Knowing "when, where, and how"
	facts definitions descriptions	rules sequences	principles schemes mental models	strategies domain specific heuristics

Shavelson et al (2005)

From formal to situated knowledge

Formal	DECLARATIVE Knowing "that"	PROCEDURAL Knowing "how"	SCHEMATIC Knowing "why"	STRATEGIC Knowing "when, where, and how"
	facts definitions descriptions	rules sequences	principles schemes mental models	strategies domain specific heuristics

Situated	DECLARATIVE "this is what things are"	PROCEDURAL "how the community of practice does things"	SCHEMATIC "why things are the way they are"	STRATEGIC "how and why things may turn out in a particular way"
	Fact, definition, description, life experience, objective substantiation – verifiable information	Practices, contexts, norms existing ways of coping with problems	Values , explanations of causes, reframing the regulatory issues	Unintended consequences; detailing complexity

Factual in nature   Interpretive in nature

Annotated corpus

N=3,602

Knowledge type

Agreement = 81%

Krippendorff's Alpha = 0.65

Knowledge source

Agreement = 93%

Krippendorff's Alpha for source = 0.79

Context

Practices

Technology

Value
proposition

Thank you!

dmitry@uic.edu

@Think_Macro
www.thinkmacro.org