2013

Governance in online communities of artistic cultural production

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http://hdl.handle.net/2144/12047
Boston University
GOVERNANCE IN ONLINE COMMUNITIES OF ARTISTIC CULTURAL PRODUCTION

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration

2013
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OF ARTISTIC CULTURAL PRODUCTION

(Order No. )

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ABSTRACT

While scholars have brought much insight into the governance of online communities engaged in the production of goods with relatively established quality criteria, such as open source software, they paid less attention to the governance of online communities of artistic cultural production. In artistic cultural production, due to its drive for novelty and potential resistance to institutionalized norms, it is difficult to create agreements and shared routines among participants – particularly during initial emergence when participants are new to one another and new to their form of contributions. In this two-essay dissertation, I study arguably the largest online community of artistic production in Turkey, Sour Dictionary, and analyze the governance configurations during its initial emergence and ongoing growth.

The first essay describes how coherence was achieved during the birth and early years of the Dictionary through the use of ambiguity in the two governance dimensions of vision and rules of production. I show that in this period, ambiguity was maintained in these dimensions not only to provide participants with the flexibility they needed for artistic expressions, but also to bring clarity to the recognition of participants’ allegiances. The presence of a shared opposition among participants appears key to achieving coherence in an artistic community, and for such a community, ambiguity is an
adaptive resource rather than something to eliminate as is often argued within an economic logic.

The second essay follows a natural experiment where the founder's changing decisions on two other governance dimensions of quality assurance and member recruitment, along with his utilizations of IT for growth, resulted in different outcomes of coherence and popularity during the community's ongoing growth. As the founder switched the combination of his use of IT and member recruitment method from one that invited slow and incremental growth to one that brought sudden and massive growth, the community faced a variety of problems in both outcomes. I show that these problems arose as the founder responded to growth by implementing quality assurance methods that emphasized efficiency rather than flexibility, and thus failed to address the ambiguity and contestability of quality criteria in artistic production.
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CHAPTER 1

GOVERNANCE PRACTICES IN A NEW ORGANIZATION OF ONLINE ARTISTIC PRODUCTION: VISION AND RULES OF PRODUCTION

Abstract

As new online avenues of cultural participation emerge among people who are both new to each other and new to cultural production, achieving coherence across contributions may be difficult due to the absence of preexisting shared practices to draw upon. This challenge is amplified if the community is engaged in artistic production which values continuous generation of uniqueness, creativity and variety in contributions, rather than establishment of routines toward formulaic and repetitive products. In this study, I explore the understudied domain of governance in artistic production and analyze how the dimensions of “vision” and “rules of production” were configured during the successful emergence of Sour Dictionary, an online community of artistic production in Turkey. I demonstrate that, in the case of Sour Dictionary, rather than a movement toward more clarity, ambiguity was deliberately maintained as the parameter of governance in both dimensions. I find that ambiguous statements of vision and rules of production act not only as a source of flexibility by enabling creativity and variety in contributions, but also as a source of clarity to members as they use them to assess each other’s allegiance in the community’s relational struggle against its antagonist, a dominant monolithic mass media. I also highlight how the presence of such a relational struggle brings coherence to the community and prevents their contributions from
becoming arbitrary and unrelated due to the flexibility provided by ambiguous
governance mechanisms.

**Key words:** online community, artistic cultural production, governance, ambiguity,
relational struggle, antagonism, mass media
INTRODUCTION

With increased access to the Internet’s affordances to produce, disseminate and consume cultural goods (Healy 2002), the economic capital requirements for participating in cultural production have dropped so dramatically that the gatekeeping of many traditional institutions, such as print media, publishing houses, television networks, and record labels is not viewed as a major concern (Klinenberg and Benzecry 2005, Schäfer 2011). As the phenomenon becomes more salient and central in our everyday lives, our incentive to understand the organizational practices and consequences of how people participate in the field of cultural production using this new media is also growing in urgency. In the broadest sense of culture as the characterizing practices, beliefs and behaviors of a group of people or a society (Ouchi and Wilkins 1985), many Internet users have undoubtedly become active contributors as they express their moral, political and aesthetic preferences online within what has come to be called a “participatory culture” (Jenkins 1992, 2006; Schäfer 2011). A comment on a news site, an opinion on an online community of interest or an aesthetic preference declared on a social networking site can all be viewed as forms of cultural participation from this perspective. Within the more narrow definition of cultural goods as those that serve an aesthetic or expressive purpose rather than a utilitarian one (Hirsch 2000), such as “literature, music, visual and performance arts, libraries, archives and the like” (Healy 2002), there are also many new online platforms for participation. Wikipedia, Youtube, DeviantART, Indaba Music, Sound Cloud or Podiobooks are but a few examples of many such online avenues of cultural production. Most of these online collectives, within both definitions of “culture”,
appear to share some common characteristics: participants often begin contributing without knowing most of the other participants; they are usually new to actively expressing their cultural views (Lih 2009; Schäfer 2011); and they are engaged in a type of production that is highly vulnerable to disagreements and conflicts because there is not an “objective” measure to determine the superiority of one cultural good or preference over another (Bourdieu 1984; Reeves and Bednar 1994; Björkergen 1996; Lampel et al. 2000). In fact, allowing participation by anybody with an interest rather than solely by experts designated by mainstream institutions, and enabling collaboration between previously disconnected individuals are perhaps the most attractive characteristics of alternative online cultural production platforms, such as Wikipedia or Indaba.

As online cultural production platforms loosen restrictions for participation, relax the criteria for contributions and emerge with new voices, they are also likely to face organizational challenges in achieving coherence among their participants, most of whom have neither a history of shared practices nor an extensive background in professional institutions associated with their attempted form of cultural production. Such an online collective that emerges among participants without existing shared templates can be analogized to a community of practice in the making, rather than one with historically and locally situated, already legitimized practices and values (Lave and Wenger 1991; Østerlund and Carlile 2005). While members of such emergent collectives may enjoy the freedom of not having to satisfy existing expectations and performance criteria, their lack of shared reference points, common languages and routinized practices can prevent them from learning from prior experience or communicating adequate participation standards
or skillful contributions (Nelson and Winter 1982; Lave and Wenger 1991; Brown and Duguid 1991; Wenger 1998; Feldman and Rafaeli 2002; Elkjaer 2003). By the same token, without the guidance of shared tried and true practices from a common collaborative history, potential for misunderstandings and disagreements about how the organization should function is likely to be high (Nelson and Winter 1982) and consistency across contributions is likely to be low (Aldrich and Fiol 1994). Thus, prospects of survival and early growth for emergent communities of cultural production should depend on how well they are governed to achieve some coherence among their participants and contributions.

Governance mechanisms can be difficult to design and implement if the type of production does not lend itself to comparisons across different products. In other words, assuming that a central role of governance is to coordinate and control the direction of a collective toward the production of “desired” products, as opposed to “undesired” ones, an inability to distinguish or formulate the differences between the two can prevent governance dimensions from being configured adequately. Cultural production, when it follows an artistic logic, as opposed to an economic one, is such a form of production: preference for the production and consumption of any artistic good can always be interpreted ultimately as a “matter of taste” and no “objective” method exists to measure the superiority of one cultural product over another. Therefore, disagreements are ubiquitous among artistic producers and consumers. Moreover, artistic cultural production favors the continuous creation of novelty and resists conformity to institutionalized norms (Bourdieu 1983, 1984, 1993; Martindale 1990, Sternberg and

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Lubart 1995; Lampel et al. 2000; Eikhof and Haunschild 2007). Indeed, many scholars argue that a primary characteristic of artistic production is its intention to provoke doubt, unsettle existing beliefs and challenge established assumptions (Merleau-Ponty 2004/1948; Shklovsky 2004; Barry and Meisiek 2010). Thus, not only do new online communities of artistic production begin without a history of shared practices among participants, but they are also likely to be resistant to the development of common rules and recurrent practices.

This does not mean that governance is not necessary in or inapplicable to artistic production. Although artistic work is often associated with chaotic characteristics such as production of continuous novelty, freedom of expression and non-conformism, organizational studies and strategy research have also discovered an important role that organizational practices encouraging stability, conformity and regularity (e.g. standardized work processes, established routines, commonly-accepted rules) play on inciting creativity and innovation: they provide a necessary backdrop against which change can be recognized, isolated, implemented and assessed for consequences (Nelson and Winter 1982; Zucker 1987; Leonard-Barton 1992; Moorman and Miner 1997; Csikszentmihalyi 1999; Feldman and Pentland 2003; Howard-Grenville 2005; Gilson et al. 2005; Labatut et al. 2012, among others). Thus, when relatively recurrent practices or schemas for action do not exist, creativity is likely to be unbounded and the direction of novelty can be highly unpredictable. This evolutionary view where the “new” makes sense only with the “old” has also been confirmed by practice scholars in how change comes about in the tensions between non-canonical practices and canonical guidelines.
(Suchman 1987; Brown and Duguid 1991; Orr 1996), new technologies and established practices (Brown and Duguid 2000; Boczkowski 2004; Labatut et al. 2012), apprentices and masters (Lave and Wenger 1991), and new classifications and old practices (Weick 1995, Bowker and Star 1999). While these findings remind us of the need for some extant stability to spur creativity, their applicability to emerging online collectives of artistic production remains unclear because they reflect empirical settings where performance standards are relatively uncontested and established routines already exist. Thus, while having some existing stability is good for creativity, an emerging online collective of artistic cultural production has neither such stable organizational practices in place nor necessarily an interest in constructing them.

In summary, the combination of “newness” and “artistic cultural production” on the Internet is a common setting, but one that is difficult to manage due to the potential for differences and disagreements among participants and their contributions. Motivated by these challenges, in this study, I aim to identify the organizing practices of an emerging online collective engaged in artistic cultural production and with contributions by members mostly new to one another and new to their practice. Specifically, I focus on practices related to the presence and articulation of “shared vision” and “rules of production”, two of the governance dimensions listed by Markus (2007) in the context of open online communities. By studying the emergence and early growth of Sour Dictionary, an online collective of artistic cultural production based on literary skills, I identify how these two dimensions were configured and whether or how they aided the accomplishment of coherence of the community.
THEORY

In this section, I first explain in more detail how the empirical conditions of an organization outlined above - its newness, its members being new to each other, its members being new to the practice and its involvement in artistic cultural production - progressively complicate attempts to coherently organize. Then, I describe how the conceptual toolkit of governance used in the context of open online communities (Markus 2007) can bring us insights into the organizing practices of large-scale online cultural collectives.

Emerging Organization among Members without Shared Practices

While all organizational efforts involve the coming together of individuals with some preexisting skills and expectations, new online organizations that emerge with participants without a common history of shared practices carry potential challenges of translating, reconciling or negotiating knowledge and interests across many boundaries of local and divergent viewpoints (Carlile 2004). Such a new organization, at least in the beginning, lacks established routines and naturalized symbols and artifacts that act as common grounds and states of truce (Nelson and Winter 1982) or boundary objects (Star and Griesemer 1989; Bowker and Star 1999; Carlile 2002). Perhaps, a shortcut is to imagine an organization where participants begin as relatively equal newcomers, as opposed to newcomers that learn their trade by socializing with old-timers, watch established practices and work toward already legitimized mastery (Lave and Wenger 1991).
This phenomenon of new actors organizing without preexisting shared practices is described conceptually in the entrepreneurship research as “nascent organizing”. Santos and Eisenhardt (2005, 2009) describe nascence as a period characterized by high ambiguity and various incipient practices, in contrast to established organizations. During nascent organizing, no organizational output is dominant; discernable organizational structures are absent; markets are unclear, and common identities are not yet articulated (Rindova and Kotha 2001; Lounsbury and Glynn 2001, Wry et al. 2011). In this period of potential and variety, the overall organization appears ambiguous to its participants and markets because it has not yet converged in its practices and outputs, as opposed to an established institution with products that have predictable performance in well-defined markets and routinized ways of producing them (Tushman and Anderson 1986; Hargadon and Douglas 2001).

While ambiguity can be a critical source of flexibility (Eisenberg 1984), research has consistently found that, over time, new organizations move from divergence and nascence toward convergence and establishment. This switch from a chaos-heavy organization to one that is order-heavy, as depicted in Figure 1, not only has implications on efficiency (Nelson and Winter 1982; Cohen et al. 1996; Adler et al. 1999), but also creates shared languages and states of agreement (Nelson and Winter 1982), enables learning by making visible recipes for action (Levitt and March 1988) and legitimizes organizational interests and identities (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Feldman and March 1981; DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Wry et al. 2011). Moreover, by framing and reducing the variety of their outputs and routines, new organizations clarify their identity to
external stakeholders, such as their customers and investors (Dutton and Dukerich 1991; Hargadon and Douglas 2001; Kennedy 2008; Navis and Glynn 2010).

In new online collaborations that can scale rapidly in size and without preexisting shared practices, it is reasonable to expect organizing attempts to follow a top-down direction rather than to accommodate the resolution of differences across each dyad. Simple, well-formulated and documented rules regarding participation can accelerate the convergence of potentially diverse viewpoints, while clear statements of vision can serve to reduce the ambiguity that participants have regarding the identity of their organization. For instance, research in open source software communities identified many organizational mechanisms aimed at maintaining some control over the direction of the communities, even though such communities are often known for their autonomous and pluralistic organizing principles. Examples of such mechanisms are: formal layers of authority to centralize critical decisions (Scacchi 2004; O’Mahony 2007; O’Mahony and Ferraro 2007); demonstrations of technical aptitude and adherence to joining scripts during member recruitment (von Krogh et al. 2003); allocation of different roles and rights, such as “code commit” rights to the most skilled participants (Jørgensen 2001; von Krogh et al. 2003; O’Mahony 2007); and visible entry points for newcomers through the framing of modules (Lerner and Tirole 2002; von Krogh et al. 2003). These mechanisms are often quite expansive and immediate in their implementation: they apply to an entire community or project, and forms of authority exist from inception (O’Mahony and Ferraro 2007).
From nascence to establishment: A path from divergence and variety to convergence and similarities*

Nascent Organizing

Members: characterized by divergence of and variety in interests, language, practices, definitions of quality, desired identity and outputs; high degrees of novelty across members

Organization as a whole: appears nebulous, chaotic, uninstitutionalized and ambiguous due to the amount of internal differences preventing a singular coherent view of the organization.

Mode of production: Artistic and creative

Established Organization

Members: characterized by convergence and similarities in their interests, language, definitions of quality, shared identity; representative outputs; low degrees of novelty across members

Organization as a whole: presents regularities in its activities; identities are well-articulated; relatively stable routines and tried-and-true practices are formed; variety of outputs reduced

Mode of production: Economic and repetitive

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* The distance between the isosceles sides of the triangle represent the relative novelty involved in the boundaries across organizational members (Carlile 2004): the more nascent an organization, the more potential novelty organizational members present to one another.

** This period can be equally viewed as the period of newcomer integration. The more established an existing organization is, the quicker the newcomer goes through the learning process and runs the distance from nascence to establishment, or from apprenticeship to mastery.

Figure 1: From Nascence and Divergence to Establishment and Convergence: Period of Institutionalization and Routinization
Another novel aspect of this phenomenon is the relation of members to their practices. As Klinenberg and Benzecry (2005) note, the Internet has provided many people who never had a chance to get their voices heard with an avenue for self-expression. However, in many online communities built around this motivation, participants often have little or no institutionalized forms of education or previous occupational experience in what they are doing. In types of production where “high” and “low” performance can be distinguished with relative ease, commonality in backgrounds can be irrelevant. For instance, as long as programming codes compile and execute, it matters little if the developer has a degree in software engineering or years of experience. Similarly, a contributor to Wikipedia can write articles, the accuracy of which can usually be verified, regardless of whether he or she has the “necessary” background (Lih 2009). However, when quality criteria are not as “objective”, such as in artistic cultural production (Reeves and Bednar 1994), not having familiarity with similar past practices can cause participants to experience communication problems and/or disagree on the quality of each other’s contributions due to “matters of taste”.

In summary, new online organizations among participants who are both mostly new to each other and new to their practice must emerge without the benefit of existing organizational stability, instead operating initially in ambiguity with regard to practices, products and identities. Organizational literature suggests that, over time, such new organizations move from this divergent and nascent state to a more convergent and established state in their struggle for survival. While many findings describe how this can be done by new firms in economic fields of activity, whether and how large scale online
collectives engaged in cultural production go through similar processes require investigation.

**Artistic Cultural Production: Field of Contestations and Novelty**

According to Bourdieu (1984, 1993), the field of cultural production, by being "relatively uninstitutionalized, non-hereditary and open to symbolic contestations", is "the arena par excellence of struggles". Since no cultural good is inherently better than another, clear and commonly accepted quality criteria that can act as common ground either do not exist or are very short-lived (Bourdieu 1984, Reeves and Bednar 1994). Lampel et al. (2000) describe the peculiar nature of cultural production as follows: "basic notions of quality tend to remain contestable in cultural industries. Whereas in industries where goods are utilitarian, producers usually develop a consensus on specific and often measurable standards of quality, in cultural industries standards represent abstract ideals rather than specific product attributes". In fact, for some artists, even pronouncing the word "quality", let alone its criteria, can be offensive due to its affiliation with economic markets (Lantz 2008).

The *artistic logic* of cultural production values products that are unique and open to multiple interpretations (DiMaggio 1987, Antonietti and Cantoia 2000), as opposed to an *economic logic* where formulaic copies with clear assessment criteria are preferred (Bourdieu 1984, Eikhof and Haunschild 2007). Original artistic goods are characterized by "non-measurability" and "non-comparability" (Eikhof and Haunschild 2007). Continuous production of new artifacts and innovative expressions, along with vague
criteria for quality assessment, make stable reference points difficult to find and communicate, which in turn makes coherent organizing among artistic producers a challenge. With so many different and changing opinions about quality, producers can find it hard to distinguish why some products do well and others do not (Lampel et al. 2000). This is especially the case for new artists who, in the absence of previous audience feedback and institutionalized backgrounds, have no clear expectations about whether their contribution will be lauded or unnoticed.

Moreover, artists are motivated by a search for autonomy and driven by non-conformism: “[T]he pure intention of the artist is that of a producer who aims to be autonomous, that is, entirely the master of his product, who tends to reject not only the ‘programmes’ imposed a priori by scholars and scribes, but also … the interpretations superimposed a posteriori on his work” (Bourdieu 1984, p.3). Non-conformism is also encouraged by an audience of “believers” that demands and rewards the romantic stance associated with artists’ disavowal of economic interests and rejection of institutionalized norms (Bourdieu 1980). Artists often provoke doubt and defamiliarize their audiences by disconfirming existing beliefs (Merleau-Ponty 2004/1948; Shklovsky 2004; Barry and Meisiek 2010).

Resistance to conformist cultural practices brings with it two challenges to coherent organizing. The obvious one is that creative people do not like to be managed in oversystematic ways that can restrict their freedom of expression (Sutton 2001; Eikhof and Haunschild 2007). But if each participant maintains full autonomy, there is a risk that
they create products that are too diverse to appear collectively coherent and engage in internal struggles as to the identity of organizations they attempt to build. The unwillingness of artists to explicitly classify and formulate their work and creative processes does not make it easier for such new collectives to construct shared practices. The less obvious challenge is to manage artists’ simultaneous embrace of individual autonomy and non-conformism. Although these two concepts can appear compatible at first sight, in practice, they put artists in an ambivalent position: while artists like to draw upon the ideology of non-conformism to pursue the freedom to express their original contributions, they also compete with others individually for distinction (Bourdieu 1984). Thus, even if an artist prefers exclusivity in order to receive the most accolades, he or she has to endorse an ideology that continuously threatens it - that others should also express their unique points of view and claim new value by doing something different than his or her own works. Communities of artistic production, therefore, need governance practices tailored to managing uneasy alliances built upon this tension across self-interested pursuits and tolerance of variety.

**Governance Dimensions of Shared Vision and Rules of Production**

The concept of governance in online communities can be defined broadly as “the means of achieving the direction, control, and coordination of wholly or partially autonomous individuals and organizations on behalf of an online effort to which they

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1 Bennett’s (2010) study on the process of popular music production shows how artists try to conceal even the most recurrent formulas used in popular music by expressions that “shroud it with romanticism and mystery” in order to protect their artistic persona.
Although governance has been commonly viewed as a solution to social dilemmas experienced during the development of public goods, Markus (2007) highlights additional purposes, such as solving coordination issues and creating a climate for participants. Moreover, due to its potential applicability to any open content creation community, Markus’ framework enables comparisons across different empirical settings, including the context of open source software communities, in which the concept is most commonly used (Lerner and Tirole 2002; von Hippel and von Krogh 2003; Demil and Lecocq 2006; Shah 2006; O’Mahony 2007; O’Mahony and Ferraro 2007, among many others). Governance is also a helpful concept in online collectives that operate almost exclusively on information technology infrastructures and can grow rapidly because some organizing principles are embedded in the design of the infrastructure. Matters such as how information is presented, what categories are available for navigation or what media can be used during online participation are all critical design aspects that overlap considerably with how participation is organized. Thus, the conceptual toolkit of governance can assist with the discovery of the possibilities of action implied by the design elements of information technologies as they realistically enable and constrain specific ways that individuals can participate in an organization (Zammuto et al. 2007).

Markus (2007) lists six dimensions of governance in the context of open source communities: ownership, chartering a project, community management, software development processes, conflict resolution/rules about rules, and use of information/tools. Among these dimensions, I adapt two of them from the context of open source and
rephrase them to better describe my empirical setting of the emergence period of an online collective of artistic cultural production: “shared vision” (i.e. chartering a project) and “rules of production” (i.e. software development processes). I constrained my analysis to these two dimensions for two reasons. First, focusing on a few dimensions rather than all of them helps manage the scope of the study in the relatively understudied domain of cultural production; this approach is consistent with the way that the open source community governance findings incrementally accumulated when they were an unfamiliar empirical setting. Second, I selected these two governance dimensions since they pertain specifically to the organizational challenges of emergence and artistic production. In this way I utilized those governance dimensions that arguably have the greatest potential to accelerate the movement from nascence to establishment. For instance, creating a shared vision and setting clear objectives can be a quick way to align the intentions of new participants early on and to bring focus to their contributions during emergence. The broad dimension of “rules of production” enables an observation of the specificities of artistic cultural production and identification of what organizing practices are preferred for managing the production of “non-measurable” and “non-comparable” cultural goods.

In summary, the goal of this research is to explore how the governance dimensions of vision and rules of production are configured during the emergence of an online organization among actors who are mostly new to each other, new to their practice, and engaged in artistic cultural production. How, if at all, do these two governance dimensions support the construction of a common, coherent direction for an
emerging organization when actors lack a shared history of collaborative practices, operate in a setting so vulnerable to disagreements about the quality of contributions and are unlikely to adhere to rules that can risk their individual autonomy and sense of uniqueness?

**RESEARCH SETTING: SOUR DICTIONARY**

In order to investigate the governance practices of a new organization engaged in online artistic cultural production, I studied the birth and early growth of an alternative online dictionary in Turkey called Sour Dictionary [the Dictionary]. Sour Dictionary is an online text-based collaborative lexicon where participants generate “topics”, write definitions of them, which they call “entries”, and create connections between topics through hyperlinks that they insert into their entries. It follows a technical configuration called a **collaborative hypertext lexicon**, which also describes Wikipedia and Urban Dictionary (see Appendix A for an early screenshot of the Dictionary). The Dictionary resembles a conventional dictionary in form, but unlike the latter where the goal is to express the most accurate meaning of a word or a phrase, participants contribute to it with entries that range from informative factual statements to subjective interpretations full of analogies and metaphors, as well as satirical views, on any topic they wish to write about. For instance, one writer defines the topic ‘book’ with the entry ‘a list of pages that makes one cry, if written genuinely’. Another one describes ‘god’ as the ‘most popular author with four global bestsellers’. What is particularly artistic about Sour Dictionary is its transformation of one of the most authoritative forms of knowledge representation aimed
at eliminating ambiguity, i.e. a dictionary, in order to challenge traditional definitions through literary techniques that endorse subjectivity and/or openness to multiple interpretations, such as sarcasm and irony. The artistic nature of the Dictionary is recognized in some of the earliest entries, where one writer described Sour Dictionary as a ‘new branch of literature’ and another as a ‘cultural spring and emotional waterfall’. One writer played with the words of “The Home on the Hill”, a poem by Edward Arlington Robinson, to describe it: “our sour fancy play for them is wasted skill”.

In Sour Dictionary, there is no explicit information on the identities of writers, but in one of his interviews, the founder described dictionary participants as those who did not have the opportunity to have their voices be heard through professional media channels. Although not representative of the entire community, none of my informants had previous experience in the fields of literature or media before joining the Dictionary. Also, when it began in 1999, Sour Dictionary represented a new form of cultural production as the founder stated: “When [the Dictionary] began, a culture of collaborative content creation on the Internet was very new, both to Turkey and to the world. Even Wikipedia was not around back then.” In other words, not only were the contributors new to literary production in the Dictionary, but also the community lacked a clear precedent to draw upon and to borrow existing practice templates from. Having begun as an overnight project of its founder, within the first two years the Dictionary exploded in content to around 100,000 unique topics and approximately 400,000 entries on them. In the same period, described as the “golden era” by one informant, the community grew to nearly 1,000 participants. During this growth, although newcomers
were admitted based on the recommendations of existing writers, they were mostly new to one another.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

I focused on a single case, for two reasons. First, because artistic cultural production is rarely studied in information systems and organizational studies, it bears close observation in order to generate theoretical insights in this relatively new domain. Second, achieving a deep understanding of this domain requires extensive data collection and analysis efforts, especially since artistic practices and products do not lend themselves to straightforward interpretations of purpose or quality (Lampel et al. 2000). Therefore, analysis requires triangulation across different sources of data and multiple methods in order to assess evidence from multiple angles (Creswell 2003).

To avoid superficial observation and familiarize myself with the community’s practices, I collected as much data from experienced participants as possible through interviews, became an active participant, and employed multiple archival sources to triangulate my observations and findings. I relied on three primary data sources: the content of Sour Dictionary, amounting to 3,322 topics generated between February 1999 and December 2000; 51 formal and informal interviews with 21 dictionary writers that were active during the first two years of the Dictionary, including the founder; and archival sources, including the dictionary’s coverage in national print and visual media, existing research on the state of Turkish media during the late 1990s and early 2000s, and publications of national and international agencies, such as the
International Telecommunications Union and the Supreme Council of Media and Broadcasting in Turkey. Through archival sources I gained knowledge of the history of the Dictionary, and this reduced the potential for retrospective bias since I did not rely solely on my informants’ accounts of the period.

I became an active participant in the community to ensure that I grasped its logic of production (Emerson et al. 2001), and to access any content that might be available only to members. I wrote entries of my own and spent hundreds of hours reading the content generated by other writers before conducting interviews. Being a part of the community enabled me to have in-depth conversations with informants who were active during the dictionary’s inception. During this time, I also reconstructed the chronology of the dictionary by collecting data from the dictionary on the number of writers, the number of topics generated, and the quantity of entries contributed. To clarify some vague or conflicting data points, I contacted the founder of the community, who used his backup files to partially regenerate the growth pattern.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Description of Data</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dictionary content</td>
<td>3322 topics collected across 18 days (one month apart) of the dictionary to assess contribution and interest overlaps; 50 unique topics coded to specify interest areas in the dictionary; 30 entries coded to analyze rules in the dictionary across 4 unique topics; more than 1000 entries tracked in multiple topics to reconstruct dictionary’s chronology in growth of content and participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: Sources and description of data collection

| Interviews | 10 formal interviews (arranged and guided), 41 informal interviews (ad-hoc and/or unstructured)  
21 informants\(^2\) (1 founder, 7 first generation writers, 10 second generation writers, 3 third generation writers)  
Interview durations ranging from a minimum of 30 minutes up to 4 hours  
Approximately 200 pages of transcript and field notes. |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archival sources</td>
<td>Turkish Institute of Statistics, Supreme Council of Media and Broadcasting in Turkey, Turkish Language Institute, Turkish Ministry of Education, International Telecommunications Union, Alexa Web Information Company, Internet Archive: Wayback Machine, 6 videos of national TV appearances by dictionary participants, 16 instances of print media coverage across five national media outlets and 3 monthly magazines, including 3 interviews with the founder.</td>
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**DATA ANALYSIS**

I began my study without a priori hypotheses, but with the objective of exploring the two broad dimensions of governance in open online communities identified by Markus (2007): (1) articulation and presence of a shared **vision** and (2) rules and guidelines of **production**. For both dimensions, my analysis employed direct and indirect means, which were then linked to outcomes of coherence. The summary of this analytical

\(^2\) Dictionary writers are labeled after their “generations”, which corresponds to the year of their entry into the community. For instance, a writer who joins the dictionary in 1999 is called a first generation writer, while one who has joined in 2000 is a second-generation writer.
process can be found in Figure 2.

Shared Vision: To examine the dimension of “shared vision”, I traced the Dictionary content for topics, entries and sections dedicated directly to discussions and statements of a mission, an overall goal, and/or ideological values, analogous to the “pillars” in Wikipedia. In addition, I had conversations with Dictionary writers with questions directly aimed at identifying their view of the vision or the purpose of the Dictionary. As an indirect indication of the presence or absence of a shared vision among writers, I analyzed the variety of interests represented in the content: if some thematic domains were dominating the content in the community, I could conclude that the Dictionary writers prioritize those particular areas of cultural production. To this end, I first assessed whether some thematic areas (e.g. sports, music, politics) systematically attracted more contributions: I randomly selected and listed fifty topics that had entries that varied in popularity as high priority and low priority topics; then I labeled them with their thematic areas of interest and sought commonalities (see Appendix B for the topics used for thematic-labeling).

To supplement this approach, I also analyzed whether participants’ contributions converged toward a fewer number of shared topics or diverged into new distinct ones over time. Increasing convergence of interest areas would provide evidence for the emergence of a shared vision that guides and prioritizes the contributions of writers. For this, I collected data on the number of entries contributed to every topic generated in one randomly selected day of each month between February 1999 and December 2000 (3,322 topics and 5,049 entries) and analyzed the changes in the distribution of entries per topic.
If over time, topics with more entries increased in their ratio within the total number of topics in a day, it would provide evidence for increasing convergence, and the presence of shared domains of interest and common priorities. The differences in the distribution of topics with different number of entries on them were assessed by two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) tests across 16 days. Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests are a common means to assess whether two data samples with nominal values are drawn from populations with similar distributions. It is non-parametric so it does not assume any probability distribution ex-ante, such as normality (Conover 1999, Corder and Foreman 2009). Therefore, it is particularly suitable for samples drawn from online communities where distribution of participant contributions can be skewed, such as toward a power law. The test produces D-statistics and p-statistics, both of which are used to provide evidence for rejecting or failing to reject the null hypothesis that "the samples are drawn from populations with similar distributions". P-values above a designated alpha (0.05 in this study) and D-statistics below critical values determined for different sample sizes provide evidence for failing to reject the null hypothesis, thus strengthening evidence for similarities. The detailed results of the K-S tests can be found in the section of findings related to governance by vision.

Rules of production: To examine the rules applying to the Dictionary’s production, I used again both direct and indirect measures, similar to my approach in examining shared vision. First, I gathered all content within the first two years of the dictionary that directly discussed ideal types of contributions, guidelines and advice. I stopped data collection

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3 The first two days in February and March were omitted from the K-S analyses due to their small sample sizes, 21 and 17, respectively.
once the hyperlinks between topics that included such content became circular referencing rather than leading me to new relevant content. I first open-coded the content in terms of the characteristics of the rules of production and then refined my categories by iterating and comparing with the interview data (see Appendix C for exemplar codes applied to the content related to rules of production, namely the topic of “advice to newcomers). During interviews, I investigated both what rules participants believed existed in the dictionary and how the participants interpreted the rules that my content analysis had identified as potentially guiding production in the community.

Since products themselves can be an indirect representation of the rules that guide their production, I also analyzed the entries to identify archetypes and to study their commonalities. My goal here was to see whether there were any implicit rules or criteria that were representative of the ways content was produced. Since the Dictionary was entirely text-based, I open-coded randomly selected entries in terms of their literary style. I continued coding until the categories I generated applied to any content I randomly selected. When my classification ended, I created a list of example entries and shared it with my informants to confirm the extent that their interpretations agreed with mine (see Appendix D for entries coded according to literary style).

*Linking governance dimensions to coherence of the community:* In organizational studies, coherence implies the presence of orderly and consistent relationships between elements of a whole, such as a meaning, a structure or a set of processes (Greenwood and Hinings 1988; Weick 1995). It has also been loosely defined in the context of a multi-product firm by Teece et al. (1994) as, “related to one another through joint operations and/or
ownership”. Since the concept does not impose any specific type of rationality in the relationships between components of an organization to constitute “coherence”, it is flexible enough to accommodate potentially counterintuitive definitions of “orderliness” in artistic production and yet familiar enough to be utilized as an outcome of interest. In this study, I treat coherence broadly as “sense of order and continuity of participation among the members of the community”.

In order to connect the findings on the two governance dimensions of vision and rules of production with the coherence of the Dictionary, I relied primarily on interview data, and archival sources in which dictionary participants appeared in the print and visual mass media. To deter elicitation of superficial relationships, I asked my informants about how they felt about a particular governance practice, and whether and how it affected their individual contributions and the sense of order in the community in general. The analyses undertaken to link governance practices with specific outcomes consisted of multiple iterations among the data, theory and literature (Charmaz 2006, p.11), where each iteration led to the construction of theoretical memos, in which I textually and graphically linked the governance parameters with coherence. These theoretical attempts, combined with continuous comparisons with the literature on governance and the field of cultural production, resulted in the emergence of promising theoretical explanations. Discrepancies and gaps between the data and the emerging theory were resolved inductively with further data collection using informal interviews. With successive iterations, relationships among the concepts became increasingly refined, and discrepancies between the data and the theoretical framework narrowed. I stopped
analysis at the point when interviews stopped providing any new insights that challenged the final theoretical framework and secondary data sources were depleted.
Description of the Analytical Process

Examining Shared Vision:

*Directly* searching vision/mission/purpose statements in Dictionary content and through interviews

*Indirectly* searching for shared priorities through identifying specifically popular domains of interest and through increasing overlap of contributions by writers in the topics they contribute to.

Examining Rules of Production:

*Directly* searching for guidelines, explicit rules and advice in Dictionary content and asking in interviews

*Indirectly* analyzing entries according to their production styles and seeking commonalities and differences.

Identification of the Parameters for the Two Governance Dimensions

Relating of Governance Configuration to Coherence of the Community:

Relating the identified configuration of the two governance dimensions to the orderliness and continuity of the community through iterating across data, theory and literature.

Figure 2: Analytical Process from Governance Configuration to Coherence
FINDINGS

Governance by Vision: Ambiguous Vision and Divergent Interests

Sour Dictionary was developed by its founder “out of boredom” within a few hours before it went online on February 15, 1999. It began with the motto “holy source of knowledge”, accompanied by a claim that it was “the most consistent, most often-updated and most accurate knowledge source that selects and filters its content with utmost care”. In an interview published a few years later in a national newspaper, its founder explained that he was inspired by the vast network of knowledge in Douglas Adams’ satirical novel “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy”, in which intergalactic travelers wrote about their observations of the universe from different locations and times into a central knowledge repository. Yet, this ambition was not communicated to the participants during the years that this study covers.

In the Dictionary, there was no separate section where newcomers could find an explicit vision statement for the dictionary or a list of values and principles that the participants were expected to endorse. In fact, even its motto and emphasis on the accuracy of its select content was not convincing given that the first entries the founder wrote contradicted them. He wrote the very first entry in the Dictionary for the topic “guitar pick” and defined it as an “awkward plastic thingy used to play the guitar”, a description loaded with his subjective interpretation and hardly concerned with accuracy⁴. Subsequent entries by the writers showed a wide range from informative fact

⁴ In fact, in 2005, the disclaimer for the dictionary became “nothing that you read here is correct”.

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statements about computer software to creative -and often satirical- redefinitions of popular culture topics, such as fast food chains and celebrities. Even misleading information could be written in this “holy source of knowledge” and not be deleted due to a lack of accuracy. In my interview with him, the founder stated that the Dictionary was not obliged to commit to a particular identity and that it was best to view it as a source of “both endless information and no information at all”. The dictionary’s stated intent of being an accurate knowledge base had such a partial and obviously inconsistent connection with the actual contributions that one could only wonder if there were other possible interpretations of this otherwise straightforward statement.

In the absence of unequivocal vision statements or goal descriptions, I investigated the possible development of a shared vision indirectly through the dictionary’s content by assessing (1) whether there were specific thematic areas that were more popular among the writers, and (2) whether writers contributed to topics generated by others more over time, regardless of specific thematic areas. First of all, the structural design of the dictionary was such that there was no imposed hierarchy of topics into broader thematic areas, such as music, literature, sports, and so on. Nor was there an authority that ranked topics as important or unimportant. All topics that were generated or contributed to on a given day were listed in chronological order of contribution on the left frame of the webpage. If one were to make an analogy to a bookshelf, Sour

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5 There were also no user-generated measures of popularity that ranked topics in their importance. Users did not have the option to provide input on topics that they liked or wished to see more.

6 The founder had initially kept all topics visible on the homepage, but when the number of topics became too large to display on a single screen, he decided to utilize a frame where topics of the day would be listed and browsed by next and previous buttons.
Dictionary would have a Sushi cookbook, a guitar magazine, an analysis of borderline personality disorder, a sarcastic approach to popular culture and a critique of French Existentialism sitting side by side on the same shelf in no topical or alphabetical order. For instance, on a randomly selected day in the first year of the dictionary, the following five topics appear one after the other indicating a surprisingly wide range of topics that the writers contributed to in sequence: “crunch”, “tonality”, “auditorium”, “underwear that gets stuck between the butt cheeks” and “log”. On another random day, “anger”, “esteban”, “1”, “prostitute” and “html” appear under one another.

In the absence of a top-down hierarchical categorization of topics, which thematic areas were more popular than others was unclear. For instance, by the end of 2000, there were approximately an equal number of entries under topics, “egg” (12), “britney spears” (14), “god” (15), “world” (14), “star wars” (14), and “microsoft” (10). As for fewer-entry topics, while “capitalism” had accumulated (6) entries, “rice”, “duck” and “marriage” each had a comparable (7). As examples of higher-entry topics, the movie “the matrix”, “istanbul” and “father” all had gained (23), (23) and (21) entries, respectively. So, while some topics were more popular than others, attempting to impose a thematic categorization did not reveal the source of their popularity due to the vast variety of interests represented. Moreover, some of the topics were so broad that labeling them with particular thematic areas was problematic. For instance, while the topic “britney spears” can be conveniently labeled as a celebrity; a broad concept such as “egg” can be viewed as an object of interest in biology, cooking, geometry, animal husbandry or art; indeed,
the dictionary writers cover all of them. In short, the dictionary appeared to be about everything and thus also appeared to be about nothing in particular.

The freedom to write about any topic and the equality of the presentation of topics regardless of their areas of interest, were accompanied by rapid growth in both the variety of topics and the number of writers. By the end of the first year, 367 writers had initiated 31,000 topics; in the second year, the number of writers increased to around 1,000 and the number of topics tripled to reach 100,000. To assess whether the writers had some shared topical interests which I was unable to identify through an imposition of thematic categories, I analyzed whether writers were focusing their entries collectively on some topics irrespective of their specific areas of interest: if more entries converged on fewer topics over time, then one could claim evidence for the gradual clarification of a common vision in the form of prioritized area of interests.

I found that the rapid rise in the number of writers and topics within the first two years was not accompanied by such a growing degree of overlap across the writers, as measured by the number of entries contributed to a given topic. First of all, across the 18 randomly selected days on each month between February 1999 and December 2000, the average number of entries per topic remained more or less steady around the average of 0.66 with a standard deviation of 0.06. In order to assess changes in distribution, first graphically, I grouped all topics into four categories: those with one, two, three and more

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7 Just as there was no hierarchical thematic categorization for topics, there was also no way to view entries related to the different meanings of a concept in separate topics, such as Wikipedia’s utilization of its “disambiguation” pages.

8 This sample amounted to a total of 3,322 topics and 5,049 entries. Average number of topics and entries per day in the sample were 185 and 281, respectively.
than three contributions. As can be seen in Figure 3, the contribution of 1-topic entries continuously dominated the content in the Dictionary throughout the first two years and comprised between 63% and 79% of all content, starting from the third month. Topics with two entries, i.e. one additional contribution by another writer, continuously fell within the range of 16% to 23% of all content generated on a given day. On the basis of power law expectations on the Internet (Adamic and Huberman 2001) one would expect much of the content to be concentrated on a few topics. In the Dictionary, content within topics with more than three entries remained between 2% and 6%, with a single exception of 8%. The stability in the distribution of the number of entries per topic on each day suggests that the dictionary writers did not show a growing interest in converging toward the same topics.
Figure 3: Distribution of Entry Frequencies by Topic over 18 months
As mentioned in the data analysis section, I also ran two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) tests to assess similarities of distribution across each day, excluding the first two due to their small sample sizes. This, in total, amounted to 120 tests comparing each day with another, including the earliest with the latest. The findings show that in none of the tests could the null hypothesis that the samples are drawn from populations with similar distributions could be rejected (see Table 2 for a summary of results). To add another layer of robustness, I ran K-S tests at more aggregated levels where I grouped the data in quarters (aggregating to four groups of four months) and in half (aggregating two groups of eight months). The K-S tests at these more aggregate levels also failed to reject the hypothesis that the samples carried similar distribution characteristics. These provided further evidence that there was no growing convergence among the participants in terms of their interest areas and that the dictionary writers preferred to generate new topics rather than increasingly contributing to each other’s topics.

Overall, I observed that ambiguity best characterizes the nature of the dictionary’s vision because, although the dictionary had an explicit motto and an accompanying disclaimer, these statements were not only not followed, but also were contradicted at times. Moreover, instead of becoming a community focused on few shared areas of interest, the topical coverage of the dictionary continuously expanded in new directions while the writers did not exhibit a higher overlap of interests by contributing more to each other’s topics. In the case of Sour Dictionary, since participants were not constrained by an imposed objective or prioritization of interests, the content grew rapidly both in amount and variety.
Table 2: Summary table for two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests of distributions across 16 days, 4 4-months and 2 8-months.
Governance by Rules of Production: Ambiguous Guidelines and Products

The dictionary began with no separate section or code of conduct explicating how topics should be initiated and entries should be written. There was also no editorial control prior to the publication of a topic or entry; writers’ contributions would appear instantly once they submitted their entries. During our interview, the founder confirmed that he deliberately avoided an explicit list of rules during the emergence of the Dictionary because he was worried about interpretive differences across writers. Another informant claimed that it would be a “fruitless attempt” to try to formulate what made a good topic or entry. While my informants believed that an entry or topic was better if it was “unique” or “witty”, these criteria were subjective and not governed by an explicit, intentionally-designed formula for production.

One exception to the absence of explicit guidelines was the topic of “faulty entry examples” that the founder created to clarify what he called the “dictionary format”9. The topic, generated on May 2000, 15 months after inception, included a list of eight mistakes that the writers could make. These mistakes were related to ensuring that entries would be grammatically structured to “define” their topics, and described exceptions (e.g. entries on topics that had already been defined; exemplification topics which ask for lists (e.g. “most delicious fruits’’)). If an entry broke one of these eight rules, it could be deleted by the founder and persistent violations could end up in a writer being banned from the community.

9 In presentation, this topic was not any different than other topics. If nobody contributed to this topic, then the only way to read its content was either to search for it, which presumed that the reader knew the name of the topic in advance, or to follow a hyperlink in another topic.
Although these rules were arguably made to bring consistency to the form of participation, the founder never really communicated them to the writers while he was deleting content and banning writers. Thus, writers were finding out that some of their content or even their membership status was deleted without their knowledge of what was actually wrong. Indeed, a first generation writer characterized the judgment of banning a writer as “godly”, referring to its sudden and unexplainable nature. According to a first generation informant, the writers had to rely on their intuition rather than rules:

“When I began writing, I did not know any rules to adhere to. I know that they somewhat existed because some writers were kicked and entries were deleted, but to me they seemed very flexible. I knew what to do without anybody telling me. It was more intuitive than anything else. Some just had it and some did not.” – 1st Generation Informant

There were three additional topics in the Dictionary that arguably included some guidelines to participation in the dictionary: “advice for newcomers”, “entry” and “conceptual limitations of the dictionary”\(^{10}\). However, these topics were written almost exclusively by people with no formal authority, and described vague and contradictory courses of action. I analyzed the content in the topic “advice for newcomers” because, with 22 entries, it was the topic with the most number of contributions, while the other two topics had less than a handful of entries each.

The topic of “advice for newcomers” included entries that were ambiguous and full of contradiction. Instead of providing a straightforward formulation of what needs to

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\(^{10}\) In this topic, there was a single entry by the founder stating that as long as there are no insults that could endanger some form of retaliation toward the community, writers can write anything about anything they want to.
be done to become a good dictionary writer, one writer mockingly suggested that the writers should “strictly avoid eating onion/garlic in the morning and, while taking a bath, wash the back of [their] ears thoroughly”, while another warned that the newcomers “should not whistle as they walked past the dictionary cemetery”. There were glimpses of seriousness, such as a writer’s admonishment to “be a good reader before becoming a good writer”, but overall the advice entries were far from being specific enough to guide contribution.

Not only were advice entries mocking, but they also signaled contradictory attitudes about participating in the Dictionary. Among the advice entries, a newcomer could read both how welcoming the dictionary was to different perspectives, and how fearsome it could be if mistakes were made. One of the advice entries read: “not everybody can think the same thing, love the same thing, defend the same thing; for that to happen, everybody must have come out of the same mold and that is impossible”. Directly underneath this entry was a contrasting warning by another writer: “there is fascism in here; don’t forget”. The co-existence of an entry describing tolerance for variety with one warning of a fascist regime did not necessarily suggest a disagreement among the advice-giving writers because single entries also included opposing remarks, as if writers were deliberately trying to confuse the newcomers: “do as these advice-givers say but don’t do what they do.” With conflicting instructions as to how they should participate in the Dictionary, new writers had to figure out on their own which path to take. I asked an informant how such advice to newcomers could be used to guide action:
"Well, there are these [guiding] topics, but I don’t know... [Laughs after silence] Does this make me a bad writer [not to have paid attention to them]? But really... There was no such thing as ‘you should do this’ there. [When I asked her the meaning of the advice on avoiding garlic in the morning, she laughed again] You know they’re just having fun with the new writer. If you don’t see the joke here, you have to be a very rigid, strange person" – 2nd Generation Informant

The preference for ambiguity in the rules of the Dictionary is consistent with some of the founder’s design decisions that were aimed at keeping participants’ entries open to multiple interpretations. With the help of appropriate software, he had limited the form of contributions to such a primitive text format that many specialized grammatical rules that are traditionally used to reduce the amount of possible interpretations could not be used by the writers. For instance, exclamation marks were not allowed, although they are conventionally used to signal sarcasm or express the intended tone of an entry less ambiguously. Another example was the avoidance of capital letters, which limited the communication of potentially aggressive tones in the Dictionary; all text would appear lowercase regardless of how writers submitted their entries. No other media to enrich and supplement the meaning of contributions, such as pictures or videos, were accommodated. With only lowercase text, little use of punctuation marks, and avoidance of cues that could reduce ambiguity, the Dictionary content was reduced to such a form that the tone of statements was concealed. In the absence of explicit cues to reduce the ambiguity of the entries, it was up to the writers to use their own interpretive skills to distinguish sarcasm from straightforward statements, and facts from fiction.
Governance Practices of Ambiguity and Coherence in Sour Dictionary

Findings suggest that the governance practices of the Sour Dictionary during its emergence entailed (1) ambiguity of shared vision, and (2) ambiguity of rules of production. While many new organizations have been found to prefer a movement from nascence to establishment, from divergence to convergence, and from ambiguity to clarity, the emergence and early growth of Sour Dictionary provides an interesting anomaly in its persistence with characteristics of divergence. The dictionary writers did not try to avoid the ambiguity of the governance configuration; instead they encouraged it: They complicated the rules of production further by entering vague and confusing advice. They used literary techniques open to multiple interpretations, such as sarcasm and irony, although they did not provide each other with cues to clarify the meanings they intended. And they continuously expanded into new topics rather than coming to share fewer domains of interest with other writers.

Despite the fact that these characteristics were associated with misunderstandings and disagreements, and that some members were indeed ejected from the community in the first two years, the number of participants in the dictionary and content grew steadily: by the end of February 2001, the community had grown to nearly a thousand writers who contributed around 100,000 topics and approximately 400,000 entries. For the writers that remained, the community was living its “golden era”, in the words of one informant who also added that “[I] would willingly stay in on a Friday night, make a hot cup of cocoa or coffee, and dive in on the dictionary for hours at a time.” Another stated: “I’m sure there was no grudge among the writers. It was really great. If there was any sort of
disagreement, it would be more about outwitting each other than anything else.” The founder stated in 2001 that the Dictionary had demonstrated “in a completely uncontrolled manner, how the concept of ‘truth’ could be so relative and how knowledge could be looked at from so many different angles”. Among the writers, the most common analogy used to describe their collaborative production in the Dictionary during this period was one of Voltron, an 80s animation TV-series about a gigantic robot, which could only be formed by the integration of five distinct robot lions, each one piloted by a different person\textsuperscript{11}.

The Dictionary’s preference for ambiguity in its vision and rules can be partly explained by the community’s emphasis on the artistic values of creativity and freedom of expression. Broad statements of vision and guidelines are relaxed in their practical authority; thus they can enable the production of a higher variety of cultural goods and opinions (Eisenberg 1984; Benford and Snow 2000). Without a clearly formulated direction, writers were free to expand to topics in their own interest areas. This resonates with findings on how social movements with broader framing attract diverse participants due to the multiplicity of possible interpretations (Benford and Snow 2000).

However, the following question still begs for an answer: how did the dictionary maintain sufficient coherence to attract continued participation of an increasing number of writers when its self-contradicting position as a source of “endless information and no information at all” and ambiguous parameters of governance could easily turn it into a

\textsuperscript{11} In fact, in order to submit their logon information to start participation, writers would need to click on a button called “form Voltron”.

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chaotic setting with arbitrary contributions? To answer this question, one needs to take seriously the nature of cultural production as the creation of goods that are valued by how well they can equip different groups in their relational struggles (Bourdieu 1980, 1984, 1993; Hesmondhalgh 2006). “Tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference” argues Bourdieu (1984; p.56) in his theory of distinction, before describing the field of cultural production as constituted by fortresses not only competing in real and claimed differences in cultural goods\(^\text{12}\), but also dependent on each other for existence. Such a perspective allows us to search for sources of coherence among the Dictionary participants by analyzing how their cultural goods, as disconnected and arbitrary as they may seem vis-à-vis one another, are in fact positioned similarly vis-à-vis shared antagonists. In other words, in order to understand the purpose and form of cultural production in one locality, it is necessary to look outside it and find its “evil twin”. From this standpoint, it is not surprising at all that most new art waves are classified relationally and make sense only when juxtaposed with the ideals and practices that they stand against (Dowson 1994, Lubin 1994, Beyer 2000, Greene 2000, Friedenwald-Fishman 2011, among others). In the next section, I first provide evidence for the Dictionary’s antagonistic stance toward a dominant mass media in Turkey and then describe how the ambiguity that characterizes the governance dimensions of vision

\(^{12}\) For instance, he explains how avant-garde artistic taste stands in opposition to the bourgeois taste for an orthodox representation of the denial of social reality, and sometimes carries similarities with elements of popular mass culture because the latter is also negated by its primary antagonist bourgeois (e.g. an enemy of my enemy is my friend). Similarly, he spends great deal of effort to describe the production of cultural goods designed to appeal to the petit-bourgeois as always trying to catch up with its genuine dominating counterpart. He also describes how the working class has a dominated taste for aesthetics because it has been successfully sold an idea of “natural” and “pure” taste, and distanced from its accomplishment because “only the cultured can have access to it”, a luxury working classes cannot have.
and rules of production take on a strategic meaning when analyzed within this relational context.

Dictionary’s Antagonistic Position vis-à-vis Turkish Mass Media

In an interview he gave years after he began the dictionary, the founder stated that “sameness” was a chronic problem in Turkey and the Dictionary was there to challenge this. According to him, it was very important to have an alternative media outlet such as Sour Dictionary to fulfill the expressive needs of those who were critical of the established cultural practices in Turkey or simply had different tastes.

“The only word that can be used to define the Sour Dictionary is variety... Sameness is such a disseminated pattern that whatever happens, people react in the same way. I think we [Turkish society] are very bad at getting off the ‘train of society’ and walking on our own feet... If we live to ‘agree with all of the above’, we live for nothing. This is why the Dictionary exists.” – Founder of the Dictionary

The Dictionary writers saw the monolithic state of mass media as a source of this “sameness” problem and the foil against which they could express their unique points of view. In 1980, the nation had undergone a military coup that had brought all media channels under state control for almost a decade to follow. After the deregulation of mass media in 1989, the number of outlets had increased but they were only available to a few powerful players with the economic means to reach nationwide audiences (Çaglar and Çakar-Mengü 2009). Throughout the 1990s, the interests of less than a handful of large holdings were promoted by the many television stations and newspapers they themselves controlled. In 1999, when Sour Dictionary was formed, 70% of the print media and 33%
of the television sector were controlled by only two conglomerates (Tokgöz 2003, pp. 39-63).

The writers believed that if the mass media were functioning effectively, cultural life in Turkey would be open to a wider variety of perspectives. According to my informants, it was the media’s duty to inform and educate the public, due to its influence in shaping society’s reality. My informants believed that while it was the faithful consumers of mass media that made their everyday lives more difficult and often the subject of their topics, it was the producers of mass cultural products that were responsible for the “sameness” quality of much of the society. One of my informants explained that she did not “expect empathy from a guy [that harasses her on the street] who was beaten five times a day by a dad who watches television series on tribal vendettas”, and another said that “a housewife’s urgency is to watch soap operas so that her husband comes home to find her waiting obediently at home”. While feeling constrained by the established, “same” cultural practices that were uncritically embraced by much of society, my informants were clear in stating that it was the stance of media that had to change first, “in a land where people do not have the luxury to think critically”.

“Media? I hate media! [Pauses...] Well, not all of it... They have the greatest power in the world and look how they are using it. Bullshit!” – 2nd Generation Informant

The stance of Sour Dictionary towards the mass media was also clear from the entries about it. Within entries between 1999 and 2001 under the topic “media”, none are appreciative of mass media channels, one writer quotes Baudrillard’s “debauchery phase
of news”. Another defines media as “the shepherds that lead the herd; the herd of shepherds led by others”. Three writers prefer brief descriptions such as “power”, “for sale. always…”, and “hidden collusion”. A writer explains in detail how the media channels serve to selectively support the interests of the broad business portfolios of their owners. The Dictionary’s stance toward the mass media went beyond acknowledgment of its failure to fulfill its duties, to being the primary raw material about which writers satirized. For example, although they did not favor any of the popular television channels, the Dictionary writers watched them intensively as a source of content to satirize.

Similarly, despite expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of mass print media, they read daily papers frequently, knew about columnists, and regularly observed how events and cultural products were interpreted by them. The dictionary was highly responsive to mass media and the cultural products and producers they endorsed; as issues covered by the mass media (e.g. celebrities, shows or newsworthy events) changed, so did the Dictionary topics and entries, in response to it. Below is a quote from a Dictionary writer on a national TV show in Turkey as he described the writers’ stimulus for its satirical content:

“We just sit in front of our TVs and watch you guys [celebrities]. And fortunately or unfortunately you do some ridiculous thing and we simply type it up on our computers as we see it. The dictionary is our own media and we are having fun” – 1st Generation Writer

While the writers satirized much of the popular content produced by mass media, they also sought to discredit the authority of the mass media to evaluate cultural practices or lifestyles. The writers did not want Turkish cultural aesthetics to be determined solely
by the concentrated mass media and its influence. This reflected an antagonism between the Dictionary writers and mass media producers, along with the popular figures and cultural goods endorsed by them. This opposition was clearly apparent in a national TV appearance of a Dictionary writer, who was invited to speak about how Dictionary writers interpret popular culture. He sat across from and explicitly denounced multiple celebrities who defended the quality of their works by referring to the meaning of aesthetics. The Dictionary writer then argued against the celebrities’ claim of having access to aesthetic criteria. The show was a reminder of how contextual and highly contested the cultural production arena is.

**Dictionary Writer:** “There is no universal, higher authority on who decides who is an artist and who is not”.

**Celebrity A:** [Sighs] “The criteria have changed so much: art, artist. [Pauses] There are criteria that apply to art. You cannot simply announce yourself as an artist and become one. There is no need for a higher authority because a phenomenon of aesthetics goes back hundreds and thousands of years. Above everything, there is aesthetics.”

**Dictionary Writer:** “In the beginning of the 20th century, there was a post-Duchamp crisis. Marcel Duchamp was the first who questioned the concept of art. By providing a readymade fountain and reservoir, he claimed that anything can be art. Now, if you put a Greek vase in a museum, it exists as art. If you carry wine in it, it’s a jug.” [Turns to one of the celebrities] “Now, my question to you is how you are interpreted. Do you exist because of your position as an artist or because you are material for ridicule?”

**Celebrity B:** [enthusiastically] “I exist because of my art.”

**Dictionary Writer:** “You see? You can say that. But that’s where we disagree with you.”

**Celebrity C:** [Frustrated by the dictionary writer’s persistence on subjectivity as a means to judge artistic products] “Then I forward your judgment to God!”

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Dictionary Writer: “Well, and I forward your judgment to Aristotle because I am not making these things up about aesthetics”

Governance Practices of Ambiguity: Strategically Meaningful in Relational Context

In addition to their suitability to artistic values such as creativity and freedom of expression, reliance on ambiguity in governance mechanisms has clear strategic value for the Dictionary when we consider its antagonistic stance vis-à-vis the mass media.

Ambiguity of vision and the consequent divergence of areas of interest helped organize cultural production in the Dictionary in relation to the mass media, since the ongoing proliferation of new topics generated content on the many topics covered and influenced by the mass media. In this way, the lack of overlap between writers’ topical interests actually enabled more overlap between the Dictionary and the broad coverage of the mass media. Within the community, no categories appear to be dominant and prioritized, but when the mass media is brought into the analysis, writers wove a blanket covering all areas of popular culture that had traditionally been monopolized by the mass media.

Paradoxically, ambiguous rules were used not only to allow for flexibility, but also to bring clarity as to whether participants were fit to write for the Dictionary (e.g. to identify the “rigid person”). Ambiguous entries challenged readers to choose the “correct” interpretation among multiple possible interpretations, such that excelling at this served as a signal of a writer’s competence and allegiance. Thus, rather than acting as a source of confusion, ambiguous rules were actually a means of assessing the adequacy of the participants. Such a covert way to test the quality of participants allowed the Dictionary to conceal its antagonism vis-à-vis the mass media, while remaining
consistent with the dictionary writers’ appreciation of uniqueness and freedom of self-expression, two important characteristics of artistic production.

Those who were able to decode the sarcasm and contradictions in the rules were also skilled enough to see this literary technique as the preferred type of production in the Dictionary. The practice of creating ambiguous products in the form of sarcasm is also strategically meaningful from the perspective of the Dictionary’s position vis-à-vis mass media. Sarcasm contests and ridicules its objects, but it also protects its writers and platform from those in positions of power by simultaneously reaffirming the status quo. By allowing the writers to claim conformist interpretations at will, sarcasm is resistant to counter-attacks such as claims of defamation. In fact, a recent news report described how the use of sarcasm was in decline in Egypt after being used heavily during the revolution (Slackman 2011). Thus, not only does the ability to decipher each other’s sarcasm signal similarities among participants, but it also indicates that the participants of the Dictionary are involved in an antagonistic struggle where subtleness is valuable ammunition. In confirmation, during my interview with the founder, he identified sarcasm as his “favorite form of contribution” because he believes that it may be the only means to bring about substantive change in Turkey, where “people in positions of power are incapable of receiving direct criticism”.

Perhaps, the trickiest part of this study was to discover how writers identified cases of sarcasm. This was a critical element of inquiry because recognizing sarcasm was the primary way of recognizing the allegiance of the Dictionary participants. However, while sarcasm can be obvious at times, a statement is actually and paradoxically not
sarcastic if it is obvious. Entries were submitted in primitive text that concealed their intended meaning. Moreover, writers did not solely contribute sarcastic entries, so one could not assume in advance that an entry would be sarcastic. So, how were writers able to select the right interpretation and implicitly communicate these to each other?

Interestingly, I find that the answer to this question lies in an examination of the self-contradicting identity of the dictionary as a source of "no information" and "endless information", in the founder's words. While writers did not have any means to verify misleading information for accuracy or value judgments for honesty, they did use the accuracy of informative entries as anchors to identify the intentions of specific writers. By simultaneously expanding into niche topics that were typically beyond mass media's coverage, and by writing highly informative rather than sarcastic entries on them, the Dictionary writers signaled more accurately the instances where they could be using sarcasm, as follows: when a writer had so much knowledge of (which could be verified for accuracy) and appreciation of a niche cultural category outside the coverage of mass media, then he or she must have been sarcastic in his or her entries that appeared to endorse the mass media position. By contributing highly knowledgeable entries while simultaneously deconstructing the works of mass media, writers proved their cultural expertise, an expertise that could not have been obtained solely by exposure to the mass media. For instance, the same writer who introduces Carl Gustav Jung to the Dictionary through theories of collective unconscious, two months later, "sympathizes" with how difficult it must be for [a very popular Turkish television celebrity] to gain so much money through gambling. Another writer explains the role of Carl Sagan's deist stance in
his novel, Contact, while in another entry “appreciates” a Turkish pop singer, who has her morning TV show for housewives, “for her unbreakable commitment to truth because she can say without fear that football is a game played among humans and that being human is a condition to win”, as a response to her argument regarding why the team she supports can win the next match despite being underdogs: “they are humans, we are humans; we can win this”.

DISCUSSIONS

As mentioned in the theory section, one of the main difficulties that emergent organizing around artistic cultural production entails is its potential mismatch with the expectations of institutional theory, i.e. the movement of routinization from nascence to establishment. The case of Sour Dictionary suggests that there is reason to approach communities of artistic production with a different logic than those engaged in economic production. For organizations with economic goals, routinization is beneficial internally because it enhances efficiency, improves coordination, enables learning from experience and aligns conflicting interests across participants, while externally it presents predictability in the performance of an organization’s outputs, clarifies its identity and increases its legitimacy. In such organizations that are inclined toward convergence, change is the more mysterious phenomenon than stability\textsuperscript{13}. Sour Dictionary, however, provides a contrasting setting where the artistic nature of production involves continuous change and the mystery lies in the establishment of a clear vision and shared rules of

\textsuperscript{13} In these organizations, change comes from an exogenous shock, from interactions between structure and agency as gradual sneaking of novelty that disconfirms the outcomes of existing routines, or from agency as efforts of mindfulness or abduction.
Firstly, I find in the case of Sour Dictionary, that ambiguity, rather than clarity, is the main ingredient for the governance of participation in artistic cultural production. Ambiguous statements of vision and rules of production satisfy the artistic nature of cultural production by encouraging members to diverge in terms of their interest areas and contributions. Thus, it provides them with a sense of uniqueness and originality. In this sense, ambiguity works as a source of flexibility, highly appreciated in the production of creative and artistic cultural goods. Moreover, in the Dictionary, ambiguity is not a temporary state of unease or source of change, but rather a permanent modus operandi that serves to maintain the nascence of the community and the “childish” nature of art (Hirst, quoted in Day 2010). These findings contrast with the view of ambiguity as something to be eliminated in order to achieve efficient information processing (Daft and Lengel 1986; Daft et al. 1987 among others on information richness theory), as an obstacle to achieving shared meanings or as a source of dissonance to be resolved during sense-making (Weick et al. 2005). The community’s lack of movement toward convergence echoes Bourdieu’s (1984) description of cultural production as “relatively uninstitutionalized” and highlights the peculiarity of an organization with artistic intentions rather than economic pursuits.

The role of ambiguity in preserving flexibility and creativity in organizations can be found in Eisenberg’s (1984) conceptualization of “strategic ambiguity”. Eisenberg (1984) observes ambiguity not as a temporary or undesired state for organizing but notes that it can actually be an intentional strategy to keep multiple interpretations available to
the organizational participants when creativity is needed (Hatch 1999, Jarzabkowski et al. 2010) and disagreements can be unresolvable (Matei and Dobrescu 2011). Ambiguous statements can “allow for agreement in the abstract and the preservation of diverse viewpoints” (Eisenberg 1984). Similarly, Benford and Snow (2000) argue that social movements can be framed deliberately open and elastic in order to attract a wide variety of participants. Ambiguity as a governing principle also resonates with its being viewed as a critical resource for organizations that emerge among participants that are highly autonomous and operate within unclear task definitions (Contractor and Ehrlich 1993).

Ambiguity can suspend disagreements by avoiding the specifics upon which conflicts can arise, but it should not be confused with the cause of coherence in the community. While ambiguity in vision and rules of production can accommodate diversity, the range of such diversity needs to be bounded by the substantive interpretations of participants in order to generate sustained and coherent participation. In the case of Sour Dictionary, this substantive element of agreement and the presence of the common ground upon which “diversity unifies”, in Eisenberg’s terms (1984), can be found in the participants’ skillful recognition of the antagonistic relation of power between the community and the mass media. Convergence is one of allegiance rather than recurrence of practices.

The case of Sour Dictionary illustrates that a primary force preventing variety from arbitrarily diverging in artistic communities is the presence of a relational struggle (Bourdieu 1980, 1984, 1993), as well as its recognition by the members. Bourdieu (1984) reminds us that taste in cultural goods—as it relates to both their production and
consumption-is "an affirmation of differences" rather than a mysterious recognition of their superior inherent aesthetics. Thus, it is imperative that an analysis of cultural production visits the social dynamics, relations of power and thus the "differences" in which they are produced and which they aim to produce. This study brings to foreground the importance of seeking such relational struggles as the source of coherence in artistic production and demystifies works of art and transforms them from arbitrary matters of taste assessed subjectively (Reeves and Bednar 1994) to products that are aimed at shifting and/or maintaining objective relations of power.

The concept of relations of power has a strong tradition in the analysis of organizational practices, but it is mostly used to explain how similarities arise rather than how differences are maintained. Institutional theory, for instance, is focused on the role of "others" in providing organizations with readily available templates from within well-established fields to relieve political pressures of legitimacy (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). There is a vast tradition in sociology on how prevalent norms and practices come about as outcomes of struggles across different factions of the society and how taken-for-granted practices are remnants of battles previously undertaken (Foucault 1980, Haraway 1991). Inside organizations, routinized activities can be observed as "states of truce" (Nelson and Winter 1982) and adoption of the "technical and rational" in an organization can be traced to its political and power-related motivations and consequences (Bowker and Star 1999, Avgerou and McGrath 2007).

In most studies that take relations of power seriously and carry a critical perspective, the interest is predominantly on how variety becomes suppressed and the
multiple becomes singular. In artistic cultural production, however, there is a stronger opposite urgency on the continuous generation of uniqueness, novelty and variety. This suggests that for artistic production to be meaningful, producers need relations of power in states of struggle because the emergence of a “winner” risks artistic goods to become repetitive and mainstream, thus of lesser value and relevance. From this viewpoint, it should not be surprising to observe a different role of relations of power on the organizing of an artistic community. The case of Sour Dictionary highlights that organizing practices of artistic cultural production involves a militant character that is aimed at maintaining its antagonism and resisting dominant cultural practices. In a way, Sour Dictionary needs mass media as its raison d’être and can be viewed as operating under an antimorphic pressure, one that pushes the community to continuously differ from and challenge “the normal”, products and endorsements of mass media in the case of Sour Dictionary, rather than an isomorphic pressure toward adhering to it.

Ambiguity as the parameter for vision and rules of production serves multiple strategic purposes within this relational context. First, it can conceal the antagonistic stance of the community by avoiding direct confrontation with the dominant media institutions that they criticize through sarcasm and irony. This is similar to findings on the “deniability” of logically ambiguous or broad statements (Eisenberg 1984, Paul and Strbiak 1997). Second, it provides participants with an ability to freely move in new directions vis-à-vis its antagonist without being constrained in its options (Whinston and Geng 2004; Jarzabkowski et al. 2010): as the products and endorsements of mass media change, so do the topics covered in the community. And finally, ambiguity can act as a
source of clarity when participants use it to assess one another’s skills and allegiance: ambiguous statements create opportunities for projection by enabling an observation of which of the possible interpretations an individual selects on his or her own (Jarzabkowski et al. 2010). It is this skillful recognition of the “correct” relational positioning of the community that binds the participants in a coherent manner although their products appear unrelated and non-convergent when analyzed without their relational context.

Figure 4 depicts the community of artistic production as engaged in the larger context of relations of power. It is within this context that these communities need to satisfy the divergent characteristics of art as continuous supply of creativity and variety, and the convergent characteristic of participant’s belonging to the same fortress. Ambiguity as a governance parameter for vision and rules of production satisfy both of these organizational demands. Due to its openness to multiple interpretations, ambiguous statements of vision and rules of production attract and encourage a wide variety of participants and contributions. From this sense, ambiguity is a source of flexibility. On the other hand, ambiguity can be used as a strategic source of clarity to organizational members because ambiguous statements can be used to assess how each participant interprets them and whether he or she can find the “correct” interpretation. The ability to do so suggests a shared allegiance. Moreover, skilled participants choose to use ambiguity as their primary rule of production as it allows for deniability in case any of their products are interpreted by their antagonists as offensive and subject to accountability.
As mentioned in the theory section, the arrival of new practices in an organization has often been explained by the unfolding relationship between “the old”, i.e. existing institutional arrangements, and “the new”. This study shows that in artistic production, “the old to draw upon” should be interpreted as “the antagonist to differ from”. Therefore, it agrees with the evolutionary view of new practices but highlights that in artistic production, the ground-figure relationship is not to be found within the organization, but rather in its relationship with its antagonistic counterpart. The memory of the organization, so to say, lies in the participants’ interpretations of what the mass media has been doing before and during the community’s inception rather than in the history of the community itself.
Divergent Characteristics of Artistic Production
(creativity, uniqueness, novelty, autonomy, non-conformity)

Mutually dependent and simultaneously present
(regulation without obedience to rules)

Convergent Characteristics of Artistic Production
(allegiance, acting as collective unit)

Ambiguity as a Source of Flexibility:
Flexibility in production and variety of interests due to multiple possible interpretations of vision and rules.

Ambiguous Vision and Rules of Production
(unclear collective direction, vague and contradictory guidelines)

Ambiguity as a Source of Clarity:
Testing for adequacy and allegiance through observation of selection among possible interpretations, i.e., opportunity for projection.

Figure 4: Governance Practices of Ambiguity and Management of Artistic Cultural Producers
In summary, this study has two main contributions, one broadly on how relations of power affect organizing in artistic cultural production without necessarily forcing it toward convergence in terms of a clear vision and formulated rules of production, and another more narrowly on the versatility of ambiguity as a primary governance parameter in such production. It is important to note at this point that while the need for distinction from an antagonist may appear strongest and most urgent in artistic production, it is nevertheless present in many contemporary commercial organizations that aim for “the new” innovative products by differentiating from “the old”. Just as the relevance and value of artistic goods are reduced in the absence of referral points that they challenge, as this relationality disappears with the success of a product and “the old” is forgotten as a point of comparison, economic goods also become commoditized, mundane and less valuable. Therefore, it should be reasonable to expect from organizations aiming for new value by continuous innovation to be in pursuit of “antagonistic backdrops” against which they claim distinction. It is also likely for such organizations to rely on ambiguity in their governance dimensions to justify their changing directions and to enable internal processes flexible enough to adapt.

CONCLUSION

The case of Sour Dictionary demonstrates ambiguity as a central characteristic of governance of vision and rules of production in artistic production and highlights the role of relations of power, namely antagonistic struggles, in analyzing such production without falling into the pitfall of reducing works of art as “matters of taste”. Although one needs to be cautious in generalizing the findings from a single case, it provides
Evidence that new online communities engaged in artistic production may have a tendency to maintain their nascent characteristics as they attempt to continuously generate unique and novel products, as opposed to setting straightforward rules and clarifying their identity. They are likely to resist routinization and the subsequent clarity as ambiguous statements of vision and rules enable artists to freely express their diverse views. I also find that a potential problem of arbitrary divergence of interests encouraged by ambiguous governance mechanisms is countered by the presence of a relational struggle that binds participants together and provides the community with coherence. In other words, a set of artistic products that appears as inherently disconnected and unrelated at first can be found to carry coherence when analyzed in relation to an antagonist. Ambiguity, from this perspective, reappears as a strategic tool in that it protects the community in its struggle by allowing for deniability of antagonism and opportunities for projection for potential members in order to assess their allegiance.

This study should be viewed as a call to more closely investigate the broad range of online cultural production platforms within the perspective of relations of power in which they operate or host, and with an eye on their peculiar governance characteristics. With so many people expressing their unique opinions, values and aesthetic judgments online, the Internet has become one of the primary avenues of cultural production. Most of these settings are very different from commonly studied settings of established organizations or those that aim for establishment because there is often little urgency among participants to agree upon and share recurrent practices. This study begins this work by utilizing the frames of shared vision and rules of production to understand the
process of emergence of one online cultural production community. From the perspective of these frames, ambiguity of expression and relational antipathy stood out as unique arbiters of this emergence. It is hoped that future researchers extend these findings to other communities of online cultural production, to understand more deeply the role they play in both emergence and throughout the life of such communities.
CHAPTER 2

BALANCING GROWTH AND COHERENCE IN ONLINE ARTISTIC PRODUCTION: MEMBER RECRUITMENT, QUALITY ASSURANCE AND IT’S GROWTH AFFORDANCE

Abstract

Governance studies of open source software communities have reaped insights into how growth and coherence are balanced when technical competence can be observed with relative ease and quality criteria are well-defined. However, artistic cultural production is characterized by ambiguous and contestable criteria for assessing the quality of contributions and the skills of participants. As cultural production is increasingly taken up by online communities, the issue of how they balance growth and coherence in the absence of objective performance criteria becomes important. Little empirical research has been undertaken to address this problem. In this study, I investigate how the governance dimensions of (1) member recruitment, (2) quality assurance and (3) IT’s growth affordances were configured in one such community, and the consequences of these on the community’s growth, coherence and popularity. Through a longitudinal analysis of Sour Dictionary, arguably the largest online cultural production community in Turkey, I demonstrate that the founder of the community responded to the rapid growth of the community by relying increasingly on governance parameters that moved away from an artistic logic to an economic one, although the dominant form of production remained closer to the former. I show that when quality
assurance mechanisms and member recruitment methods do not address the ambiguity and contestability of quality criteria in artistic production, they create loss of coherence in the community through inconsistency of quality across products, concerns about preferential treatment among members, and even a transformation of identity.

**Key words:** artistic cultural production, online community, governance, member recruitment, quality assurance, IT affordance, growth, coherence, popularity
INTRODUCTION

The production, dissemination and consumption of information goods have reached unprecedented scales and speeds with the use of information technologies (IT) in the last decade. The question of how to balance growth and coherence of participation in community-based online production has consequently become a growing area of interest to scholars and practitioners. First, because many online communities engage in the development of public goods, a core area of inquiry has been how to achieve growth while inducing relevant and high quality contributions in the presence of conflict between individual and collective interests, i.e. social dilemmas, through governance mechanisms (Fulk et al. 1996; Monge et al. 1998; Lerner and Tirole 2002; von Hippel and von Krogh 2003; Markus 2007). A related stream of research has contrasted online community-based production with traditional hierarchies and investigated organizational practices that relate to why some open communities, in particular open source software (OSS) communities, perform as well as they do (Raymond 1999; von Hippel 2001, 2005; Demil and Lecocq 2006; O'Mahony and Ferraro 2007; Zammuto et al. 2007).

In general, the use of information technologies allows online communities the possibility of growing rapidly without the bottlenecks of traditional institutions (Klinenberg and Benzecry 2005), and can realize hidden synergies across previously disconnected individuals. Without the structure either of markets or hierarchies (O’Mahony and Ferraro, 2007), online community-based production often entails fluid forms of participation characterized by flexibility and continuous change (Zammuto et al. 2007; Faraj et al. 2011). However, while they accommodate the expression of previously
unheard voices and skills, most of these communities are neither fully open nor arbitrary settings: Findings, mostly from open source software (OSS) research, suggest that although the size of a community is critical for success (Raymond 1999, Wayner 2000, von Krogh et al. 2003), community-based production grows coherently when its autonomous and pluralistic characteristics are balanced with governance mechanisms aimed at maintaining some order and control over the direction of the community. Examples of such mechanisms are formal layers of authority to centralize critical decisions (Scacchi 2004; O’Mahony 2007; O’Mahony and Ferraro 2007); demonstrations of technical aptitude and adherence to joining scripts during recruitment (von Krogh et al. 2003); allocation of different roles and privileged rights, such as “code commit” (Jørgensen 2001; von Krogh et al. 2003; O’Mahony 2007); and visible entry points for newcomers (Lerner and Tirole 2002; von Krogh et al. 2003).

As empirical settings, OSS projects provide much insight into how growth and coherence are balanced through governance in community-based production. However, whether and how these insights apply to other types of information goods are questions that have yet to be answered. In this study, I focus on the growth of an online community engaged particularly in the production of artistic cultural goods, which are characterized by properties of “non-measurability” and “non-comparability” (Eikhof and Haunschild 2007). Since artistic cultural production rarely entails clear and commonly accepted criteria for assessing contribution quality (Bourdieu 1980, 1984, 1993; Reeves and Bednar 1994; Lampel et al. 2000), it is a considerably different setting from software development, where technical competence and contributions of participants can be
assessed by how well their code compiles and executes. Due to the importance of the growth, coherence and popularity of such communities, I investigate two aspects of governance closely related to these outcomes in online community-based production: member recruitment methods and quality assurance methods (Markus 2007)\(^\text{14}\). Although not previously identified as a governance dimension, I also include enactments of IT's affordances for growth, because the organizational features of a community are intertwined with the ways that IT’s are used to scale and control the size of membership and content (Zammuto et al. 2007).

**THEORY**

In this section, I first describe the characteristics of cultural production and the different logics that drive it, i.e. artistic as opposed to economic. Then, I visit existing research on the two governance dimensions of member recruitment and quality assurance in OSS communities, and use this established stream of research to introduce, compare and contrast the particularities of cultural production. I finish this section with a summary of the governance consequences that I focus on in this study and the formulation of research questions.

**Field of Cultural Production:** According to Bourdieu (1984, 1993), the field of cultural production, being “relatively uninstitutionalized, non-hereditary and open to symbolic contestations”, is “the arena par excellence of struggles”. Since no cultural good is inherently better than another, clear and commonly accepted quality criteria rarely exist

\(^{14}\) In Markus (2007), these two dimensions would correspond to “community management” and to a subset of “software development processes”, respectively.
(Bourdieu 1984; Lampel et al. 2000). This ambiguity underlies the *artistic logic* of cultural production which values products that are unique and open to multiple interpretations, as opposed to an *economic logic* where replicable artifacts with clear assessment criteria are preferred (Eikhof and Haunschild 2007). In OSS communities, the quality of contributions is generally observable and this visibility aids in rationalizing governance decisions. In the production of artistic goods, the difficulties of “measuring” and “comparing” contributions (Eikhof and Haunschild 2007) creates the risk that members will view governance decisions as limiting, arbitrary, preferential and contestable. In fact, creative people have a tendency to rebel at efforts to manage them overly systematically (Sutton 2001). Furthermore, valuing originality and ambiguity as “natural” aspects of cultural production makes it particularly problematic to implement governance decisions that constrain participation by setting gatekeeping and production rules: On one hand, prescription of specific criteria to satisfy or rules to adhere to may hinder creativity; on the other hand, allowing full participation autonomy may result in content that is widely divergent and incoherent. Although similar dilemmas exist in OSS communities\(^\text{15}\), artistic producers need to resolve theirs without clear quality criteria. This motivates the following overarching research question: *What governance mechanisms are used in community-based online artistic production to manage the balance between growth and coherence?* As mentioned, I focus on two governance decisions that are closely related to both the growth and coherence of a community: its methods of member

\(^{15}\) For instance, von Krogh et al. (2003) observe that some newcomers prefer to contribute disproportionately to areas where they see more familiar entry points, even though these may not necessarily be the most critical areas in need of contribution.
recruitment, and the ways that it assures high quality content. Member recruitment
decisions may range from admitting anybody with access to the website, to a thorough
evaluation of each candidate before they are recruited (Zammuto et al. 2007). By content
quality assurance, I mean the organizational decisions related to how “defect”
contributions are monitored, detected and corrected, and by whom.

**Member Recruitment**: According to von Krogh et al. (2003), OSS communities select
their members according to their adherence to particular “joining scripts”, with the most
rewarding scripts being the ability to engage in technical discussions and to produce
working code. They also found that visible “entry points”, such as software modules,
enable newcomers to find projects best suited to their specializations. While technical
competence is not the sole criterion for member recruitment (O’Mahony and Ferraro
2007), the availability of commonly-accepted technical criteria and specialized syntax
knowledge enables gatekeepers to assess the skill levels of newcomers before they join
the community, and to assign privileges such as code commit rights to members later
(Jørgensen 2001).

In contrast, since artistic production generally lacks incontestable assessment
criteria, both the gatekeepers responsible for member recruitment and potential members
experience difficulties. For gatekeepers, admitting anyone who is interested can feed the
community with fresh ideas and stimulate creativity, but this strategy risks arbitrariness
in contributions and disagreements among members. Moreover, the broad range of
interpretations of artistic goods can attract a diverse set of participants to a community,
each of whom may have his or her own and possibly conflicting understanding of what
the community stands for. If, on the other hand, gatekeepers avoid an open approach and restrict the recruitment of newcomers in order to increase contribution consistency, the lack of well-established, commonly-accepted justification criteria can make their decisions appear arbitrary or preferential.

Aside from the relatively obvious trade-off between achieving creativity and limiting arbitrariness, Bourdieu (1980; 1983; 1984) identified two dilemmas related to growth and particularly applicable to artistic cultural producers: how to respond to rising popularity, and how to maintain exclusivity. Both of these dilemmas relate to the challenges that cultural producers face if and when they try to balance their interest in protecting their status as “artists” with the potentially tempting pursuit of an economic logic of production (Eikhof and Haunschild 2007). According to Bourdieu (1980), a large group of “believers”, namely an audience who has a stake in reproducing the faith in “the magic” of art, demands and rewards the romantic stance associated with the artists’ disavowal of economic interests and rejection of institutionalized norms. However, this tendency toward non-conformism (Davis and Scase, 2000: viii) creates tensions as to how an artistic community should grow in the face of rising popularity. Insofar as cultural producers want to remain as “artists” who value originality and avoid labels such as “gone commercial” or “sellout”, they either have to conceal the presence of economic reasoning in their practices (Bourdieu 1980; Bennett 2010) or they need to deliberately reject paths that bring them fame and recognition. In other words, they need to

16 Bourdieu (1980, 1984) sees that intermediaries, such as art dealers and publishers, act as protective screens between the markets and artists to conceal any economic reasoning that convolutes an artist’s posture of disinterestedness toward markets.
*purposefully* create novelty rather than adhering to a recurrent “winning formula”. This relates directly to member recruitment decisions. On the one hand, if the community adopts an economic logic, gatekeepers may be tempted to select only newcomers that have similar skills and interests to those existing members who contributed to the site’s rise in popularity. However, this may suggest that the community has come to resemble the practices of established institutions that it initially rejected. For instance, if some “misfit” members are ejected or denied access, this may be viewed as a betrayal of the artistic values of originality and non-conformism. On the other hand, gatekeepers may choose to honor the artistic values of creativity and freedom of expression by letting in as many participants as possible; however this may cause a decline in popularity due to the arrival of new and unproven participants and due to a lack of consistency in terms of the merits and the quality of individual contributions.

Another ambivalence in the logic of artistic production is its simultaneous embrace of the ideologies of both non-conformism and individualism (Davis and Scase 2000: viii; Florida 2002: 8): while artists like to draw upon the ideology of non-conformism to pursue the freedom to express their originality, they also compete with others individually for distinction (Bourdieu 1984). Thus, even if an artist prefers exclusivity in order to receive the most accolades, he or she has to endorse an ideology that continuously threatens it - that others should also be free to express their unique works and points of view.\(^\text{17}\)

\(^{17}\) There are tactics available to artistic producers who want to claim their exclusivity and distinction even when they seem to embrace the arrival of newcomers. For instance, they can use the absence of established quality criteria to their advantage by symbolically manipulating it and
production must not only manage the trade-off between growth and coherence in contributions, but also respond to the potentially self-contradicting interests of their members. These challenges justify a close examination of recruitment methods and their consequences for online communities of artistic cultural production.

Whether and how IT’s affordances for growth are enacted in online artistic production are also critical decisions related to member recruitment. The great capacity of IT to scale membership by treating “things” equally and with categorical precision may not align readily with the need to assess the unique merits of each new participant in cultural production. Yet, the temptation to grow a community quickly can be very strong when it is as easy as the click of a button. Therefore, it is imperative to understand how managers of such online communities configure, use or constrain the potential for massive growth that IT affords.

**Content quality assurance:** Quality assurance in OSS communities is a widely studied topic due to its differences from traditional software production. A distinct feature of OSS development is the large scale user participation in error detection. With the underlying logic that “given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow” (Raymond 1999), and by releasing versions frequently, OSS communities benefit from the feedback of their users and improve quality at a relatively low cost (Feller and Fitzgerald 2000; Mockus et al. 2000; Jørgensen 2001, Stamelos et al. 2002; Zhao and Elbaum 2003; von Krogh et al. 2003; Demil and Lecocq 2006; Aberdour 2007; O’Mahony 2007; among others).

claiming differences in quality even if there is no inherent superiority of one product over another; this is similar to what Bourdieu (1984) calls “symbolic violence”.

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However, in cultural production, the detection and elimination of errors can be quite controversial. In software development there is little subjectivity in identifying errors because, although there may be differences in the efficiency of codes, whether or not they work is clear. But what does it mean to make a mistake in cultural production?

As discussed, within an artistic logic, the notion of quality is subjective, ambiguous and contestable (Bourdieu 1984, Reeves and Bednar 1994, Lampel et al. 2000; Lantz 2008), as is the notion of “mistake”. While aesthetic criteria can be narrowed in economically driven organizations on the basis of efficiency, market demand or resource availability (Fine 1992), in artistic production, the elimination of “errors” can approximate the elimination of “differences” or “tastes”; and peer review can lead to a reproduction of majority views. I argue that we need a better understanding of the methods by which “mistakes” are defined, observed and eliminated in artistic production, and how these methods relate to the growth and coherence of such communities, as well as their popularity. For instance, if coherence across contributions is desired in such communities, it may be reasonable to constrain participation by setting some rules and using them as criteria for monitoring quality. However, even formulated rules may not be applied unequivocally and consistently in artistic production and so can lead to unease among participants. Examples of content control on online platforms of cultural production are controversial and contested. For instance, when Wikipedia decided to impose strict constraints on who can edit “sensitive” topics, it attracted much criticism from its audience as the “credo [of Wikipedia] has died hard” (Salkever 2009; Slattery 2009). Facebook’s recent policy on controlling content according to criteria of nudity and
political orientation received similar reactions, particularly by those who disagreed with how these concepts were defined and put in practice (Arthur 2012). Bans of videos and keywords by some government agencies on YouTube and Google, respectively, due to ideological mismatches have been deemed to be censorship by many people in and out of the countries where these took place. The point of these examples is not to suggest that all content should be allowed on these platforms, but illustrate the slippery notion of a “mistake in cultural production”, even if it does not appear as artistic.

Managers of online communities can use IT extensively to automate and accelerate quality control during the production of formulaic products; however this option is less applicable to cultural production, which is often too ambiguous and contestable to be reduced to “acceptable” classifications and criteria. Even basic aspects of production, such as spelling, can have many intended modifications or non-standard forms in a cultural context (Lih 2009). The biggest strength of IT arguably lies in its capacity to rapidly replicate and apply predefined rules, but using such an approach to find and eliminate undesired content can suppress and reduce the originality and novelty valued in cultural production.

Salient examples suggest that the intensity of IT use in content control varies considerably in practice. Wikipedia, for instance, uses IT mostly to enable alerts for new content creation on sensitive topics, and relies on the interpretive skills of its “community managers” to make decisions on undesired content. Facebook, similarly, removes content through its monitoring arm, which uses IT to reach the user-reported suspect content; the actual deletion is done by human agents. Comments on The Guardian’s website or
reviews on Trip Advisor appear only after editorial control, where each contribution is assessed on its own merits by an editor before allowing publication. At the other extreme, governments are known to enforce IT-enabled filters on a societal level by blocking access to certain websites, search engines and even specific words. All of these different methods are likely to result in different community dynamics as they affect growth, coherence and popularity. Thus, it is critical to develop a better understanding of whether and how IT may be used to monitor the quality of cultural goods, and to closely examine some of the methods used by communities engaged in cultural production, as well as their consequences.

**Governance Consequences on Growth, Coherence and Popularity:** In this study I focus on the consequences of member recruitment and quality assurance methods on three outcomes. First, I focus on **growth in membership and content** to observe whether different governance mechanisms and utilization of IT lead to different rates of growth. Secondly, I study the relationship of the two governance dimensions on the **coherence of the community**. Although there is not a single definition of coherence, organizational research treats the concept as the presence of orderly and consistent relationships between elements of a whole, such as a meaning, structure or a set of processes (Greenwood and Hinings 1988; Weick 1995). In this research, I adapt this definition as “sense of order and continuity of participation among the members of the community”. For instance, signs of disagreement and perceived mismatches between newcomers and existing members would indicate a lack of coherence. Finally, I investigate the **popularity of the community** with a focus on the intensity of attention.
that external audiences' pay to it, along with whether their feedback is positive or negative. I focus on this third outcome because cultural production does not take place in a vacuum, even if it isn't explicitly aimed at a specific market. Furthermore, as an online community of cultural production grows and becomes more visible, it becomes increasingly subject to the influences of its regular followers. Contemporary examples such as Wikipedia shows us that, in the eyes of an audience, a few unfounded rumors or defamatory expressions within a sea of valuable information can threaten the credibility of an entire community and call for changes to the governance mechanisms of member recruitment and content monitoring.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The underlying logic of cultural production – whether it is artistically or economically driven – is clearly a critical factor in governance decisions about member recruitment and quality assurance. Artistic cultural production requires mechanisms that can embrace the novel and ambiguous nature of its goods, whereas economic logic suits governance parameters that utilize well-defined formulas and rules to assess quality and accelerate growth in membership and content. However, often communities of cultural production are not pure forms, moving on this continuum rather than remaining static. Thus, managers of online communities of cultural production need to recognize where on the continuum of artistic-to-economic logic their communities lie at a given time, and respond with governance mechanisms that acknowledge the complexity inherent in satisfying the opposing demands of the ends of this continuum.
Markus (2007) lists six dimensions of governance in the context of open source communities: ownership, chartering a project, community management, software development processes, conflict resolution/rules about rules, and use of information/tools. Among these dimensions, I adapt two of them from the context of open source software communities and rephrase them to better describe my empirical setting of an online collective of artistic cultural production: “member recruitment” (i.e. part of community management) and “quality assurance” (i.e. part of software development processes). I constrained my analysis to these two dimensions for two reasons. First, focusing on a few dimensions rather than all of them helps manage the scope of the study in the relatively understudied domain of cultural production. Secondly, these two dimensions are directly related to growth and coherence, two constructs that are widely studied in other online communities of production: “member recruitment” methods are a critical factor in supporting growth in membership, while “quality assurance” methods can point to how
coherence and popularity can be achieved in a setting with ambiguous and contestable quality criteria. I include IT's affordances for growth in the analysis because a recognition of the capabilities and limitations of IT can help managers identify member recruitment and quality assurance methods accordingly, and integrate them with their organizational arrangements (Zammuto et al. 2007). I also investigate the consequences that different configurations may have on the growth and coherence of an online community of artistic cultural production, as well as on its popularity. The following research questions articulate the issues described above:

**Research Question 1:** What configurations of member recruitment methods, content quality assurance methods, and enactment of IT's affordances for growth are used in online artistic cultural production?

**Research Question 2:** What are the consequences of different configurations (member recruitment, content quality assurance, IT affordances for growth) on the growth, coherence and popularity of an online community of artistic cultural production?

**RESEARCH SETTING: SOUR DICTIONARY**

Sour Dictionary [the dictionary] is a text-based lexicon based in Turkey, where anonymous participants with aliases, called “writers”, initiate cultural categories, called “topics”, and write definitions under them, called “entries”. It follows a technical configuration called a **collaborative hypertext lexicon**, which also describes Wikipedia and Urban Dictionary: most topics in the dictionary are connected to one another by hyperlinks that the writers add when they contribute their entries. For instance, an entry
under the topic “love” defines it as “a program that is constantly upgraded in the matrix”, where the word “upgrade” is hyperlinked by the writer to its corresponding topic in the dictionary. Under the motto “the holy source of knowledge” and the contradicting disclaimer “nothing that you read here is correct”, Sour Dictionary writers can start topics about anything (e.g. an object, a place, a person, a phrase, an event, an ideology etc.). When authoring their entries, writers often use a definitional grammar as in a conventional dictionary. However, instead of trying to construct a single description that claims to describe a topic most accurately, each writer contributes his or her unique interpretation. Some prefer factual statements and generalizations (e.g. topic: book; entry: ‘something that is read’), while others associate topics with their personal experiences, opinions and emotions (e.g. topic: book; entry: ‘a list of pages that makes one cry, if written genuinely’). Sour Dictionary writers also employ the literary technique of sarcasm intermittently in their entries. For instance, one writer describes “god” as the “most popular author with four bestseller books”, while another defines “star wars” as “the saga, first episode of which was written by George Lucas in the toilet”. With millions of informative and sarcastic topics and entries produced and linked to one another by thousands of participants -compared to approximately 100,000 words in the official dictionary published by the Turkish Language Institute-, Sour Dictionary is arguably the largest collective cultural output in Turkey.  

18 As a crude measure of popularity, Alexa lists Sour Dictionary consistently in the top 30 sites in Turkey, which includes in its rankings global websites, such as Facebook, Google and Twitter.
RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

Longitudinal research designs are called for when looking to understand community growth over time. Thus I employed a longitudinal case study covering the period 1999-2007, starting with the community’s inception. Over this period, the founder displayed changing preferences for member recruitment, quality assurance methods, and use of information technologies, which led to different outcomes in the community. This presented me with a natural experiment to observe. During data collection, I relied primarily on three sources: the content of the dictionary (i.e. relevant topics and entries), more than 100 formal and informal interviews with the dictionary participants, and archival sources, mainly instances of the Dictionary’s mention in the Turkish media. I also became an active participant in order to learn about the production of content in the dictionary. Being a part of the community familiarized me with its practices and enabled in-depth conversations with my informants. Moreover, due to the sensitive nature of some Sour Dictionary content (i.e. covering issues such as sexuality and religion), my informants felt comfortable in the presence of a fellow participant. I limited my informant selection to those who were active writers between 1999 and 2007. Overall, I had a total of 110 formal and informal interviews with 51 unique informants, with interview durations ranging from 10 minutes to 4 hours. Perhaps my most consequential informant was the founder of the community, with whom I had an interview and multiple e-mail exchanges.

To capture the growth of the community, I collected the number of writers, topics and entries generated for 95 months between February 1999 and January 2007. To
resolve any inconsistencies in these data, I contacted the founder of the community, who visited his backup files to partially regenerate the growth pattern. Figure 6 shows the chronology of each sub-period or “epoch” of the community during this period. I collected content from the dictionary related to its technical design, member recruitment and content quality assurance methods, as well as the reactions of the writers to these aspects of the community. I also gathered print media coverage of the dictionary between 1999 and 2007 by searching the archives of the top five national newspapers, and by following a Dictionary topic dedicated to tracking the community’s appearances in the media. In total, I included 276 instances in the analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

The longitudinal analysis of Sour Dictionary is organized around three epoch periods that are characterized by clear changes in the growth pattern of the community, along with different configurations of member recruitment methods, content quality assurance methods and enactments of IT’s growth affordances. As can be seen in Figure 6, the community experienced two abrupt spikes of growth in membership followed by periods of slow and incremental growth. I identified the boundaries of the epochs inductively, as they related to critical events associated with these sudden instances of growth, which also resulted in changes in coherence and popularity. Specifically, the first epoch (1999-2001) begins with the inception of the community; the second epoch (2001-2004) is marked by the introduction of both new member recruitment and content quality assurance methods; and the third epoch (2004-2007) is initiated by a particular member recruitment decision that led to the massive growth experienced in February 2005. For
each epoch, I identified the member recruitment and content quality assurance methods that the community employed and also tracked changes in the technical design. To analyze the enactment of growth affordances of IT, I isolated the technical decisions that either aimed to hasten member recruitment and content production or those that were meant to slow them down. Also during our interview, the founder described how he used IT to create various interfaces for his own use in order to manage the growth of content and membership.
Figure 6: Chronology of the Dictionary: No of writers and entries; Dictionary’s Appearances in Media; and the Three Epochs
After I specified the configurations of member recruitment and quality assurance methods, I explored their consequences both within the community and in the ways that the community was received by the public, as measured by the reactions of the Turkish media. To achieve the former, I open coded all content and field notes that included responses of the community members to the critical changes in governance configuration and instances of growth. I delayed the latter rounds of coding until I could compare the open codes across all three epochs. To assess how the dictionary was viewed by its audience, I open coded all 276 mass media appearances and then reduced the emergent categories into cases of and reasons for “praise” or “criticism” toward the dictionary. I also had a separate category called “citation”, in which I marked each instance where national media used the Dictionary’s content in order to enrich its own production. I used the quantitative and qualitative changes in the media appearances to analyze the community’s overall popularity. After the coding of the mass media appearances was finalized, I overlaid this data on the dictionary’s chronology of epochs to discover temporal relationships. I built temporal relationships by creating theoretical memos and storyboards for each epoch. Then I compared all three epochs in order to identify commonalities and differences between them. This effort also helped me in some instances to converge the categories I had previously open coded toward a higher level of abstraction. Along with continuous iterations with the extant literature on governance and artistic production, some promising theoretical frameworks emerged. I collected new data where necessary in order to maintain a critical view of my emerging theoretical
framework and stopped analysis when the discrepancies between the data, the theoretical framework and the extant literature diminished.

**FINDINGS**

**EPOCH 1 (1999-2001): Emergence of Sour Dictionary**

Sour Dictionary began in February 15, 1999, both as an alternative avenue of cultural production and self-expression in Turkey and as a knowledge repository on the Internet. According to an interview its founder gave to a national newspaper, it aimed to create a huge network of knowledge. In less than one hour, he designed the website and the dictionary began welcoming its visitors to the “most consistent, most often-updated and most accurate knowledge source”, where the content was “selected and filtered with utmost care and that the best was done for the readers to reach the purest knowledge”. Despite the dictionary’s objective to ostensibly become a source of knowledge concerned about accuracy, it included the personal opinions and value judgments of the writers on the topics they generated. The first entries of the dictionary authored by the founder himself signaled that artistic representations of knowledge and expressions of personal views would be welcome. He defined “guitar pick” as a “tiny, plastic, weird object that is used to play guitar” and employed sarcasm in his description of “ruler”: “analytical object used by teachers to prevent their students from repeating incorrect behavior”. The topics generated on the first day also indicated that the dictionary would take cultural categories as its main source of inspiration. Of the eight topics generated on the first day, more than half were about rock music and two were about computers.
What was particularly artistic about Sour Dictionary was its transformation of one of the most authoritative forms of knowledge representation aimed at eliminating ambiguity, i.e. a dictionary, in order to achieve the opposite: the co-existence of diverse views and promotion of ambiguity by challenging traditional definitions and voicing dissent through literary techniques that are open to multiple interpretations, such as sarcasm. By providing an alternative avenue that bypassed the gatekeeping of mass media, the Dictionary attracted participants who wished to express their unique cultural preferences, which they believed were either unnoticed or disapproved of in everyday life. According to the founder, this was a reaction to a problem of “sameness” in Turkish society:

“The only concept that can define Sour Dictionary is variety... Sameness is such a disseminated pattern that whatever happens, people react in the same way. I think we [Turkish society] are very bad at getting off the ‘train of society’ and walking on our own feet... If we live to ‘agree with all of the above’, we live for nothing.” – Founder of the Dictionary

Member recruitment: For the first two years, new writers were admitted almost exclusively by the recommendations of existing members. “At first, friends from places like ICQ, IRC were demanding their accounts to be added” stated the founder. There was no section to register or apply to become a member, and no means to contact any of the writers through the website. In this method that I call “reference-based recruitment”, those who wanted to participate needed to know an existing writer who would contact the founder and ask him for admission. Growth in numbers was, in the words of the founder, “incremental and controlled”.

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Content quality assurance: Quality assurance was conducted by two moderators, one of which was the founder, who assessed topics and entries by what I categorize as “case-by-case monitoring”. In case-by-case monitoring, each entry or topic was assessed separately on its unique merits without using any formulated criteria or automated help. Within the first two years, the moderators did not provide new writers any explicit rules to follow except for a list of entry examples where the founder highlighted the importance of sticking to the definitional format in contributions. There were no explicit quality criteria for the topics and entries, and no constraints on the types of topics that writers could initiate. Topics and entries were not editorially controlled before publication; therefore the detection of problematic content depended on whether the two moderators were online and not occupied with something else. In 2001, when the dictionary reached about 1,000 participants, the founder announced that three “loved” writers were selected by the moderators to be added to the moderating staff.

It is important to note that in the first few months, the founder considered clarifying to the writers why he was banning some participants from the community, but abandoned this practice after seeing how his justifications could be interpreted in different ways and lead to concerns of unfair treatment and to personal frictions. Moreover, he did not want his view of the dictionary to be challenged during the emergence of what he saw as a “new culture of collective content creation”. This avoidance of explicit rules allowed the moderators to make their decisions on members and content without being held accountable for bending any existing rules. Briefly, the founder made some attempts to provide guidance to the participants during emergence,
but not in the form of a strict set of rules that the writers would view as demanding full obedience. In fact, more often than not, writers were clueless as to why their entries were deleted or why some writers were banned.

"We were deleting entries without giving any reason. Writers could not tell whether their entries were deleted. I removed the list of reasons for banning writers because of my frustration with having to answer people. I saw anything that could break my motivation as a threat to the existence of the dictionary." – Founder of the Dictionary

"When I began writing, I did not know any rules... I knew that they somewhat existed because some writers were banned and entries were deleted, but they seemed very flexible. It was more intuitive than anything else. Some just had it and others did not." – 1st Generation Informant

**Technical Design and Enactment of IT’s Growth Affordance:** In the first few months, the entire database of members was stored in a notepad file accessed only via File Transfer Protocol. For every single recruitment decision, the founder had to download the file, open it, add/modify/delete a record for each newcomer and upload it back. During this process, writers were unable to enter content in the dictionary. In November 1999, the founder switched to a more manageable SQL server. In March 2000, the server crashed causing some irrecoverable loss of content, after which the founder moved the data from an expensive Alpha server to an older yet faster and more reliable hardware. He also adjusted the user interface in the first few months: Initially, all generated topics were listed one under another on a single webpage. But after a few months, when a single page became insufficient to display the growing content in any sensible way, the founder switched to showing the “topics of the day” on a left in-frame and used the larger right frame to display the corresponding entries. He kept all other content available to access
either through hyperlinks or search functionality. This design choice persisted across all three epochs of the Dictionary.

The founder was cautious in his enactment of IT's growth affordances. Considering the need to monitor content on a case-by-case basis, and the presence of only two moderators for hundreds of writers, he deliberately avoided rapid bursts of growth and maintained what he called a “slow and incremental growth”. Even after he upgraded to more advanced specifications, he kept committed to reference-based recruitment in order to “prevent the dictionary from growing to a size where content is no longer manageable”.

Coherence of the Community: Both reference-based recruitment and case-by-case monitoring align well with the absence of formulated rules and quality criteria, typical of artistic production. According to one writer, the dictionary now represented a “new branch of literature”. The “reference-based recruitment” method worked well in the absence of well-defined criteria for member selection, and the need for some assurance that new writers would be adequately skilled. It also ensured some like-mindedness among the writers. Writers saw Sour Dictionary as a welcoming avenue of “free speech”, where they could share their frustrations regarding how their cultural preferences were ignored or oppressed. They also believed that they complemented each other well as they regularly analogized their community to Voltron, an 80’s TV animation series about a giant robot piloted by the harmonious coordination of five different people.

"There are some things I hold inside and can only talk amongst close friends. You know how it is [in Turkey]. It is not easy for a girl to talk about certain things. I don't even
think about it anymore. I just write everything in the dictionary.” – 1st Generation Informant

The “case-by-case monitoring” method meant that each contribution was considered in light of its unique and creative qualities rather than adherence to standard guidelines. This also matched well with the intermittent use of sarcasm, detection of which required the interpretive skills of the moderators. With reference-based recruitment and case-by-case monitoring, the dictionary grew in a controlled fashion with negligible internal conflict. The number of writers increased to 367 by the end of its first year and around 500 more were admitted in the second year. The number of new topics generated grew from 31,000 to more than 60,000, respectively for the two years, while the number of entries contributed increased from around 140,000 in the first year to 260,000 in the second. During this growth, although some writers were banned, the remaining writers believed that the dictionary was living its “golden era”. The founder stated in 2001 that the Dictionary had demonstrated “in a completely uncontrolled manner, how the concept of ‘truth’ could be so relative and how knowledge could be looked at from so many different angles”.

Popularity of the Community: With its rising number of writers and topics, as well as its unique interpretations of cultural life in Turkey, the dictionary soon began attracting the attention of the Turkish media, to which it was also an alternative. It also became a source of news and novelty for mainstream reporters and columnists to comment on. Between 1999 and 2001, references to the dictionary appeared 11 times in national print media, 10 of which praised various qualities such as its design and content. In July 2000,
a columnist even dedicated an entire section to his “wonderful discovery”, Sour Dictionary. Impressed by the wit of the dictionary writers, he called the dictionary writers “naughty geniuses”.

“It appears that these kids are soon going to tear apart the many primitive issues that we failed to cope with for years, such as ‘social and moral values’, ‘nationalistic and spiritualistic sentiments’” (Radikal, July 2000).

EPOCH 2 (2001-2004): Rapid Growth; Intensified Monitoring; Increased Popularity

With growing attention from the media, the Dictionary was no longer an isolated avenue of cultural production and its readership was expanding to new audiences. As its visibility grew, demand for participation began to exceed the capacity of the reference-based recruitment method. Also, according to the founder, the more the dictionary remained closed to new participants, the more attractive it became: “when we did not allow new writers to join, the dictionary turned into a closed community to a great extent and this made it a very attractive environment.”

The founder responded to the public attention by embracing popularity rather than remaining disinterested in it. In an interview with a national newspaper, he said: “Those who blame the dictionary for pursuing populism do not realize that this [was] our objective to begin with. We actually want to familiarize [the Turkish public with] the dictionary even more.” The “pursuit of populism” became more visible in October 2002 when some of the Dictionary content was published in the form of a print book. The
founder remarked that the content of the book was selected "to make it more attractive, we selected the humorous topics and entries that reflected the dictionary’s perspective on popular elements, such as celebrities, TV shows and films." The founder’s clear intent to grow the popularity of the dictionary received mixed reactions from the writers. Some believed that if the dictionary started attracting and admitting too many participants, wrong types of newcomers could be allowed and its quality could suffer. The overall sentiment regarding the print book was that while such a move would bring Sour Dictionary the attention it deserved, it could also create a sudden burst of interest and invite participants with average skills in cultural production. Below is an entry from July 2001, the date when the project for the print book was first announced:

"Sour Dictionary is a cultural accumulation. To spread this by publishing a book would create a temporary spark of interest and lead to a loss of the current quality. In order to understand the topics and entries, one has to hang around the dictionary for a while. I do not want ‘bestseller book worms’ to flood the dictionary" – 3rd Generation Writer (July 2001)

Actually, despite wanting to grow the community, the founder was concerned about a possible loss of quality, too. In front of an expanding audience, mistakes that could have been ignored previously could now have adverse consequences. In particular, he believed that using defamatory expressions, such as insults, instead of sarcasm could be costly. To remind the writers of this possibility, he had already initiated a topic called "entries that can be shoved up our ass" and defined it vaguely as “the name given to all entries that could risk the dictionary itself”. According to him, entries that breached Turkish civil law and that defamed figures of the “mafia and the like” must be avoided
because they could have serious consequences for the community as a whole. In summary, both the founder and the dictionary writers were confronted with dilemmas of growth in the face of growing popularity. In an attempt to capture the best of both worlds, the founder made changes to both member recruitment and content quality assurance methods in 2001 and 2002.

**Member recruitment:** In 2001, the founder augmented the reference-based recruiting method by allowing new writers to be admitted by completing an application, and introduced a process called the 10-entry test to assess their adequacy. According to this test, new applicants needed to write at least ten entries to be evaluated by the moderators before they were approved as writers. During this probationary period, candidates were called “rookies” and their test entries were visible only to them and the moderators. Once a rookie was fully admitted, all of his or her entries that had passed the test appeared instantly on their corresponding topics.

In November 2002, one month after the dictionary’s print book was published, the founder made a more substantial change to the member recruitment method due to a growing queue of rookies who were waiting for approval: he allowed more than 1,000 rookies to become writers in a space of one month without first assessing their entries, which caused an increase in the number of writers from slightly above 3,700 to more than 5,000. With this new method of “batch recruitment”, the Dictionary abandoned its commitment to incremental growth for the first time in more than three years. According to the founder, the batch recruitment was both a celebration of the book’s publication and
a response to the inability of the moderating team to handle the amount of rookies waiting in the queue for approval.

"There was a huge demand that we could not handle. Therefore, we had to first switch to an approval-based admissions method, which still meant a slow and controlled growth and then it quickly became a queue-based admissions method because of demand. In 2002, we had the first batch. So many rookies were waiting in line! We had to take more than 1,000 writers at once." – Founder of the dictionary

Content quality assurance: In July 2001, the dictionary’s quality assurance method changed with the initiation of a new category of participants, called “snitches” and moved to what I call the “peer-reviewed case-by-case” method. Selected from among the experienced writers who had contributed at least 1,000 entries, snitches were responsible for identifying problematic entries and forwarding them to the moderators who made the final decisions. While this was still a case-by-case approach to monitoring, with the introduction of snitches the number of people who were responsible for quality control increased considerably. In July 2002, one year after the beginning of the practice, there were 184 snitches helping five moderators monitor Sour Dictionary content. Snitches were given a set of controls to flag the entries that they found problematic: They needed to select a reason from a list of violations provided to them by the founder, such as “not in the dictionary format”, “this has been written before”, “not in Turkish despite not being a quotation or an example”, “may be shoved up our ass” and “one moment, let me explain” (i.e. a catch-all for any that did not fit into other categories).

Despite the introduction of these categories, there was much ambiguity and disagreement on these rules and their applications. Writers, who were now always
informed of their problematic entries and communicated the violation categories that applied to them, often objected to the reasons for the deletion of their entries provided by the moderators.

"There was ambiguity in the reasons that we listed. When I gave reasons, writers started questioning the why and saying things like, 'how was I supposed to know?' Even when I would give them similar examples, they would continue to disagree." – Founder of the Dictionary

Furthermore, although some criteria for violations were now explicitly communicated to the participants, there were other subjective criteria that were not only unmentioned, but also higher in priority when assessing the adequacy of writers and content. These superior criteria were “caring about the content” and “writing well”, i.e. literary skills. The presence of implicitly superior criteria meant that explicit rules were applied inconsistently because some content that directly violated explicit rules was not deleted due to what the moderators believed to possess high literary quality.

“A writer who writes extremely well, but just cannot nail the format of the dictionary usually receives tolerance from the moderators. In the dictionary, showing effort and care in the content that you create is the top criterion beyond any rules. Sanctions that such writers receive are different when rules are violated. Moderation always prioritizes the criterion of “ability to write well” – Founder of the dictionary

Another challenge in setting common quality criteria in the dictionary was the variety of products; the dictionary did not have a dominant type of output. It could include anything from sarcasm to facts (Gürel and Yakin 2006); even deliberate provision of false information was welcome. Setting shared quality criteria that could apply to all
types of content, which were not explicitly classified themselves, proved to be a challenging and a continuously evolving task:

"I aimed the dictionary to be a place that looks like a source of knowledge, but it could just as well include false information; a place where only its style looks like a source of knowledge, but it is equally open to indeed providing information and none at all. To walk this line, we continuously added, removed and changed rules." – Founder of the dictionary

Technical Design and Enactment of IT’s Growth Affordance: In this epoch, the technical configuration was tweaked but its overall functionalities were unchanged. The emphasis was on making the website run more efficiently by optimizing algorithms, code, encryption methods etc. There were also improvements in hardware to provide faster and more reliable responses to the growing number of writers and visitors. The founder replaced the server running on a 600MHz AMD chipset and 512MB SD-RAM with a new machine with a 2.4GHz Intel processor and 1GB DDR-RAM, donated and put together by two of the dictionary participants. According to the founder, this new server could respond to the growing demands of the community and its visitors better, with its ability to read/write/backup data while allowing tens of millions of page views in a single month.

Although the dictionary’s design and functionality did not change much, the founder made a significant change to how he utilized IT to track applicants and rookies. In order to accommodate a faster membership growth rate, he created an interface where he could observe all rookies waiting to be accepted on a single screen. This gave him a more organized but also a more atomistic view of the potential newcomers. More
importantly, he could now admit many rookies simultaneously with a few clicks of a button, enacting the growth affordances of IT using the existing database software and the server hardware. It was through the use of this interface that the founder initiated the batch recruitment of November 2002 and demonstrated IT's affordances for massive growth.

Coherence of the Community: According to a first generation informant, with the batch recruitment of November 2002, "a bold line of separation" was drawn between the existing writers and newcomers, at least initially. She mentioned that the "fourth generation [the batch entrants] became the first group of writers ever to be disliked in the dictionary". The founder also believed that this batch recruitment of fourth generation writers caused the "first serious reactions from the dictionary writers" due to a perceived "loss of quality" and the "ability of just anybody to participate", i.e. a loss of exclusivity. Within the first two months following the batch recruitment, many newcomer fourth-generation writers were accused by the earlier writers of "being naïve", "taking more from the dictionary than they give" or "not believing in search" (meaning that the new writers entered redundant and careless topics and entries). There was a "glut of complaints"; many topics about the inadequacy of the newcomers were generated (e.g. "fourth generation writers and dogs cannot enter", "the fourth generation problematic").

According to a writer, "although every social formation needs time to digest the new organism that joins it, the dictionary felt such a painful integration for the first time in its history". The following quote is taken from a first generation writer's entry on the topic, "concerns of writers about the fourth generation":

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"As a first generation... I will not act as if there are no problems and will admit that I do not like the fourth generation at all... This generation is a source of shame for the dictionary with their garbage topics and disgusting entries that can be recognized from a mile... With no motivation for self-improvement or education, these individuals have no respect for and recognition of how the dictionary operates." – 1st Generation Writer (December, 2002)

Snitches played a crucial role in countering the frictions among the writers after the batch recruitment. Since they were selected according to the number of entries they had contributed, they had the most experience in distinguishing the quality of contributions in the presence of vague and ever-changing guidelines. Also, they were skilled enough to recognize content that appeared to violate the explicit categories, but which were actually of high literary quality. Since evaluations were based on careful case-by-case examination of each contribution, snitches could interpret the adequacy of content beyond the rules, and approach it with a flexibility that the dictionary moderators preferred.

In fact, the founder had already signaled his intent to rely on snitches for content control during the batch recruitment: as the queue of rookies grew, so did the number of snitches. Between July 2002 and the batch recruitment in November 2002, the number of snitches had grown rapidly from 184 to more than 350. Many earlier generation writers appreciated the work of snitches, since ‘garbage entries’ were quickly deleted and newcomers absorbed most of the “wrath of the selection system”, as described by a writer. On November 27th, when a newcomer fourth generation writer started a provocative topic called “the spreading opposition toward snitches in the dictionary” and
defined it as "the growing frustration of writers that suffer at the hands of snitches", earlier writers responded by showing full support of the snitches. In one week, the topic attracted ten entries that unequivocally defended the practice. One entry quoted the founder and summarized the importance of snitches in a fragile setting such as the Dictionary: "we are trying to build a house of cards; don't put stones on it. The duty of the snitches is to prevent the efforts of putting such stones". Another writer took pride in "an army of snitches...that have the willingness, drive, agility and the might to eliminate any that can knowingly or unknowingly shit into the dictionary".

In response to the concerns about the fourth generation writers, and to ensure that content could be controlled without further loss of quality, the founder decided not to recruit new writers in 2003\(^\text{19}\) while continuously increasing the number of snitches. He stated that the Dictionary remained closed during these periods because they were "unable to match the growth and control the content"\(^\text{20}\). Between January and December of 2003, the number of snitches grew from 410 to 750, with negligible increase in the total number of writers. The number of writers that each snitch was responsible from dropped from an average of 11 during the batch recruitment to 7 by the end of 2003. The rate of growth of new content fell steadily from 11% during the last two months of 2002, to 7% in February 2003, and then hovered around 3% from August 2003 until the end of that year. The closing of the dictionary to new writers, and tighter monitoring of content

\(^{19}\) The only exception to this was a group of approximately 100 writers who were admitted after voluntarily participating in a campaign aided by the dictionary to send books to eastern Turkey to aid the needy.

\(^{20}\) One exception to this was a beta period in 2000.
by a strengthened force of snitches, served to diminish the criticisms of fourth generation writers. The topics, “concerns of writers about the fourth generation”, “the misfit of fourth generation topics”, and “fourth generation writers cannot enter” did not have a single entry in 2003, despite having received a total of around 40, mostly hostile, entries during the end of 2002.

**Popularity of the Community:** After the batch recruitment in November 2002, mass media’s reactions toward the dictionary temporarily split: on one hand, citations of the dictionary increased as it became recognized as a part of popular culture in Turkey. One of the newspapers even labeled it a “new media channel challenging the old”. On the other hand, the initial praises that were common during the first three years of the dictionary were replaced by a temporary wave of criticisms. Many columnists and journalists criticized the dictionary writers for insulting individuals, providing misleading information and hiding behind their nicknames. Temporary criticism in the media remained throughout 2003 and diminished in 2004.

In 2003, references to the dictionary and use of its content by the dominant media increased, indicating its movement toward becoming a loud and legitimate voice in Turkish popular culture. Between November 2002 and the end of 2003, Sour Dictionary appeared in the media 46 times; equal to the total number of media appearances in the three years prior. The unique and provocative nature of the dictionary content made for good material, and dictionary entries were used regularly to support media articles on popular topics, such as TV shows, celebrities, book releases, travel and even economics. In 24 instances, media channels used dictionary content as a reference in their news,
interviews and articles. A columnist in a national newspaper stated:

"[Sour Dictionary] is a great source of reference. Whenever I am about to interview somebody or researching on a topic, I first look into the dictionary before encyclopedias or archives". (Hurriyet, October 2003)

However, also in 2003, the Turkish media directed increased criticism toward the dictionary. Until the batch recruitment, there were only two criticisms of the accuracy and style of dictionary’s content, as opposed to eighteen mentions of praise. But between November 2002 and December 2003, the number of criticisms quadrupled to twelve instances, and praises fell to four. The following criticisms were salient: the dictionary was believed to contain many aggressive insults; writers were perceived to make inaccurate and arbitrary judgments without being fully informed. Some media participants and celebrities demanded the right to respond to defamatory statements and ask for corrections. Anonymity was also a concern; it was perceived to be causing problems by giving writers the freedom to say anything they felt without facing consequences. Although the snitches were intensely monitoring content, there was a sense in the media that the community was not adequately regulated.

"They are wildly offending whoever happens to be passing by... There is nobody to stop or control them.... Poor things, they have to hide behind their nicknames like rats. Hey, are you there? Or do you not exist? Are you only 'virtual'?" (Milliyet, May 2003)

In 2004, the dictionary strengthened its position as a legitimate player in the eyes of the media: Close to 40 citations in 58 appearances by mass media in 2004 indicated that the dictionary had become an indispensable measure of public opinion. Criticisms also diminished considerably: While 27% of mass media appearances had included
concerns about the dictionary in 2003, this rate fell to 12% in 2004, with only three mentions of concerns in the last eight months of the year. On multiple occasions, columnists stated their respect for the dictionary writers even when they were targeted by them. For instance, a national newspaper columnist felt fortunate to have such honorable adversaries as the dictionary writers and saw them “in the same business” as hers. The dictionary founder also stated his and the writers’ growing awareness of the dictionary’s public influence. According to the founder, most writers were now writing more responsibly “with the knowledge that 400,000 people will read what they write.”


According to the founder, the dictionary had become a “shelter” for those who never had the chance to pursue professional opportunities to express their cultural skills. However, when he made this analogy in May 2004, the “shelter” had remained closed to newcomers for about a year and a half. During this time, demand for participation had accumulated once again and writing in the dictionary had become an “object of desire”, in the founder’s terms. He saw at one point that a dictionary writer’s account was being sold on an e-auction website for about 1,500 Liras (approx. $1,000). With unease among writers and media criticisms mostly diminished, he began to consider growth again. He believed it was impossible to pursue a “static point of social happiness” and to protect that point by closing the community to outsiders. In fact, he observed that existing writers were increasingly concerned about monotony in the dictionary as the rate of new content
generation declined.

“When there were fewer writers below some level, the writers began to worry about monotony. They complained, “it’s always the same people, the same type of content’ when we did not admit new writers for a long time.” – Founder of the Dictionary

Member Recruitment: In May 2004, the dictionary opened its doors again to applications and allowed its registered readers to become writers. In the first two days, the number of writers exploded from approximately 4,500 to 12,000, but most were admitted as “rookies” whose entries were invisible to the public. The application window stayed open for about six months, during which there was continuous tension between the founder and moderators’ incremental approvals of the queue of rookies and the addition of new rookies to the queue. The queue of rookies grew faster than the moderating capacity for approvals: between May and November 2004, the number of active writers rose from 4,783 to 7,117, while the number of rookies doubled from around 9,000 to 18,485. Since some rookies had written hundreds of entries as they waited for approval (exceeding their 10-entry requirement), depleting the queue would take “years”, as estimated by a writer. The founder’s commitment to incremental growth persisted in 2004 as newcomers were admitted only after their invisible entries were carefully assessed until he felt increasingly pressured by the size of the queue: “I simply could not catch up with their numbers. I felt like I was torturing these people.” And at the point when he said, “‘there is this many people waiting’ and ‘there are these writers who are complaining about monotony anyway’”, he made a sudden radical move: On February 12, 2005, in an event called the “Rookie Admissions of Helm’s Deep”, all 17,000 rookies
gained full approval as writers without having their entries assessed\textsuperscript{21}. The founder described the extremity of the event to his fellow writers in the following entry:

"What will happen now has not been tried before... A catastrophic event that will turn the dictionary into something different.... The beginning of many irreversible things and a battle with a lot of bloodshed to come..." – Founder of the dictionary (February 11, 2005)

Despite the founder’s belief that the existing writers would prefer the addition of new writers because of their expressed need for fresh material, entries written on the night of “Helm’s Deep” indicated an overwhelming level of concern. Among the 75 entries on the topic before the event began, only 6 stated positive expectations. There were three distinct concerns, all of which ultimately materialized: (1) inadequacy of newcomers would damage the quality of content; (2) moderators and snitches would be under extreme pressure which could lead to intolerance of small mistakes and the banning of many potentially skilled writers, and; (3) too many newcomers would make it more difficult for individual voices to be heard. One writer even saw the event as “surrendering dictionary’s elitism, which kept its quality high, to the sticky arms of capitalism”.

“It is like an intrusion of 17,000 wrestlers into my apartment while I am hanging around comfortably in my pajamas and messed up hair.” – 4th Generation Writer (February 12, 2005)

\textsuperscript{21} In the novel The Lord of The Rings, J.R.R. Tolkien depicts the “Battle of Helm’s Deep” as clear asymmetry between the sizes of the attacking army and the defending forces stuck in a castle. The analogy denotes a similar asymmetry between the large number of newcomers and the much smaller number of existing writers.
"How rational can a few moderators be to 17,000 newcomers? Many gems in this crowd will burn to ashes..." – 4th Generation Writer (February 12, 2005)

**Content quality assurance:** Despite the extreme number of rookies and the sudden visibility of content previously generated, the dictionary did not increase its number of moderators and snitches; in fact there was a slight decline. In May 2004, when the applications had begun, the dictionary had 850 snitches and 9 moderators, whereas during “Helm’s Deep”, they had declined to 838 and 7, respectively. In other words, the same number of snitches that monitored 4,768 writers in May 2004 worked to monitor the content of more than 25,000 writers, less than a year later. In the previous year, snitches had comprised 18% of all writers, but this ratio fell to less than 3% on the night of Helm’s Deep admissions. In Figure 7, this dilution can be visually observed: the inverse relationship between the number of writers and the snitches per writer during Helm’s Deep admissions is much sharper than the one experienced in November 2002. Although the two axes are not of the same unit, the relationship between the two data series is meaningful.
Figure 7: Number of writers and percentage of snitches during batch recruitments
Although the events were similar, there were vast quantitative differences between the 2002 batch recruitment and “Helm’s Deep” batch recruitment: During the 2002 recruitment, each snitch was responsible for 22 writers and 530 new entries on average. On the day of “Helm’s Deep”, with the arrival of 17,000 new writers and the sudden appearance of around 600,000 previously invisible new entries, these figures rose to 35 and 952, respectively. Also, during November 2002, new admissions were spread across a month, whereas in “Helm’s Deep”, all newcomers were admitted overnight. In the Dictionary’s “biggest stress test to date”, as a writer described it, and "due to the extra workload that 17,000 rookies will bring”, as a first generation moderator put it, moderators would no longer be able to approach content as flexibly as they did, and warned all writers to be extremely careful getting the basics right. The founder encouraged the “zero tolerance” approach and gave moderators the extraordinary right to ban writers if they wished to. In this way, the lack of growth in the number of snitches and moderators would be compensated for by reducing the time and effort spent to assess each entry.

“If [moderators] observed any mismatch of an entry with the dictionary format, they were to ban the writer immediately. No questions asked, no rookie demotions, just deleting their accounts. We did not want to show any tolerance.” – Founder of the Dictionary

With the zero tolerance approach, instead of evaluating all the entries of a new writer, moderators began to ban writers when they detected problems in only a few of their entries - with each ban, all entries by that writer were automatically deleted, including the “good” ones. The founder saw this as a more efficient alternative to
assessing each entry one by one, justifying this approach and dealing with objections because “the difference in effort between deleting writers and entries was negligible; in both cases you just click a button”. With this “shortcut”, snitches and moderators combined to eliminate around 38,000 entries on a single day after “Helm’s Deep”, compared to 868 entries deleted on average per day before “Helm’s Deep”. This translated to 5,428 entries deleted per moderator, with the result that the rate of new content generation dropped rapidly from 13% in February to 3% in March of 2005. Figure 8 depicts the difference between the two batch recruitments of November 2002 and Helm’s Deep and shows how aggressively new content generation growth rate was brought down to a level of 3% in the latter by the moderators and snitches, compared to the gradual deceleration of new content growth throughout 2003.
Figure 8: New content growth rate between 2002-2005: Comparing the two batch recruitments
Technical Design and Enactment of IT’s Growth Affordance: Similar to the previous epoch, during “Helm’s Deep” there were only minor changes to overall functionality and hardware. Two months after the 2002 batch recruitment, the server hardware was upgraded to meet the growing demand, to a “beast... in the size of a spaceship” in the founder’s terms: four 2.8GHz processors with hyper-threading, 4GB memory and 5 SCSI connection hard drives. The only limit to the capabilities of this new machine was “the available bandwidth”. During this epoch, no changes were made to the approvals interface used by the founder in 2002. While he had the option to look closely at individual candidates and their test entries, he retained the capability to admit them all at once and utilized it. It was this growth affordances of IT that enabled him to recruit 17,000 rookies overnight.

Coherence of the Community: While there was temporary unease after the 2002 batch admissions due to fears of loss in content quality, after Helm’s Deep, the damage on the coherence of the community was both long-lasting and multi-faceted. In addition to a loss of consistency in quality, there were also concerns about unfair treatment to newcomers as they were banned in large numbers. Furthermore, some senior writers recognized and were bothered by a change of identity in the community, from a cultural one to a political one.

Inconsistency in quality: Despite the rapid rate at which entries were eliminated after “Helm’s Deep”, earlier generation writers complained about a loss of content quality and worried about ongoing expressions of insult. Although they had similar concerns after the batch admissions in 2002, this time, both the duration and the impact were more severe.
Tens of topics were dedicated to the inadequacies of the Helm’s Deep writers and the sixth generation writers as a whole. Some writers realized that an initial loss of quality was normal as it had been before, but even a year later, they reflected on what a “big strategic mistake” Helm’s Deep had been. One second generation writer believed that Helm’s Deep was the culmination of an “irreparable mistake” made in 2001, when the reference-based recruitment was first augmented by methods based on applications and 10-entry testing.

“When admitting 17,000 rookies without screening, I am sure that the founder, moderators and perhaps even the rookies, themselves, were well aware that the quality would suffer so much. For some reason, the founder is exhibiting an approach that is sinking the dictionary deeper with each passing day”. – 6th Generation Writer (March 2005)

The founder acknowledged the loss of quality, but viewed the negative reactions of earlier writers as an inconsistency on their behalf: The same writers who were concerned about monotony before batch recruitment would complain about “things like ‘anybody can write now’, and the ‘quality is suffering’” after the batch recruitment. He also believed that some earlier writers were unhappy partly because Helm’s Deep had leveled the field among writers. By showing no tolerance to small mistakes and treating each writer equally regardless of their generation, he hoped that earlier writers would regain their enthusiasm for producing high quality content rather than using their seniority to justify low quality efforts. He was of the opinion that generational distinctions had caused many skilled newcomers to be treated unfairly, and the new equality might solve this problem.
Unfairness toward Newcomers: Despite the founder’s expectation that the zero tolerance approach would level the field across the writers, in about one month, approximately 10,000 writers were banned, almost exclusively from the pool of sixth generation writers. In June 2005, the founder declared that 15,000 writers had been banned since Helm’s Deep. This meant that since the beginning of applications in May 2004, from a total of around 25,000 sixth generation newcomers, only 10,000 had survived as writers.

Between June and December of 2005, the rate of writer bans slowed as the number of writers declined from 13,570 to 12,230. However, also throughout this period, sixth generation writers continued to experience the highest rate of losses, at an aggregate decline of 13% of their population. According to a first generation writer, the sixth generation was “a generation to be sacrificed”.

Banning so many newcomers without explanation was identified as a big mistake, not only in the eyes of the newcomers, but also of some earlier writers. The expulsion of 15,000 newcomers in four months drew strong analogies to “slaughter” and “genocide”.

To be sure, Sour Dictionary never claimed to be a democratic environment: the founder was labeled “Dictionary God”, and the community governance was sometimes described as fascist. However, some writers were bothered by the fact that significant numbers of people were let in, promised an avenue of free speech and then ejected.

“As a mayor, you invite people to your town proudly telling them you have nice pink pavements for them. Then, so many people come that your pink pavements wear out because your infrastructure was not ready to begin with. Then, you slash the heads of those that complain about the worn out pavement without warning.” – 4th Generation Writer, (February 2005)
In our interview, the founder viewed the banning of so many newcomers as indicative of a serious problem, but admitted that he had not evaluated the differences between incremental growth and batch recruitment until after “Helm’s Deep”. He determined later that the probability of banning a newcomer admitted by batch recruitment was about 50%, but was approximately 16% for those incrementally admitted, reference-based or through application. He stated that in the absence of clear directions and guidelines to newcomers, the dictionary was not ready to handle such growth. He admitted that “had those writers been guided in the right direction and given the right tools, most of the bans could have been avoided.”

Change of identity: With so many newcomers after “Helm’s Deep”, the dictionary also started to take on a new identity. Prior to “Helm’s Deep”, writers had been careful to spend their efforts almost exclusively on popular cultural affairs, but much politically-loaded content began to emerge afterwards. Earlier writers believed that this content did not fit the profile of the dictionary; but since these entries did not violate the “dictionary format”, they were not deleted. It was difficult to control this change because even after losing close to 15,000 members, sixth generation writers still comprised 69% of the writer population as of June 2005. By the end of that year, six out of ten dictionary writers were of this generation, clearly indicating the presence of a new majority in the community. The founder recognized this change in dictionary’s identity, but believed that there was no reason to think of any new content as less desirable than the old.

22 The ratio had fallen to 63% partially as a consequence of the addition of about 700 new writers at the end of 2005.
According to him, change was the only way to survive, and sometimes a community needed to transform as older generations fulfilled their social lifespan.

“Content changed a lot, but in a social structure this is inevitable. I... also think an individual has a certain lifespan in a social structure: he becomes a part of it, spends great time there for a while, and stops feeling a sense of belonging to it.” — Founder of the Dictionary

“Before ‘Helm’s Deep’, there was a commonality. I could call it liberal and a bit left. Earlier writers were all well-cultured urban kids from the best schools. In ‘Helm’s Deep’, people from religious and nationalistic backgrounds joined and the dictionary turned into a place of daily politics. It now had many voices, but became a quarreling place.” — 6th Generation Informant

“The old gang always wrote for quality. [After Helm’s Deep] they never joined the populist new gang and became a niche in the dictionary” — 3rd Generation Informant

Popularity of the Community: The new political identity and the loss of quality did not go unnoticed by the Turkish media. In the first four months after “Helm’s Deep”, the dictionary received nine criticisms in the media, more than the total number for 2004, and no praise. Multiple journalists blamed the dictionary writers for their poor handling of some of the most sensitive topics in Turkey, such as the position of the Kurdish ethnicity, and assumptions of the presence or absence of an Armenian genocide. Some intimidated the dictionary writers’ social position was no longer significant in Turkey:

“[After Helm’s Deep] the clearest signs of how the dictionary’s quality suffers are the presence of insults toward people whose privacies are violated and the reproduction of extreme right positions taken in sensitive topics, such as politics or sexuality. It is one of the best places to observe the level of confusion in our youth.” — Birgun (February 2005)
“Dictionary...became the chaotic mental garbage of a new generation.” – Aktuel (May 2005)

According to the founder, the number of complaints that the dictionary received directly from its readers increased considerably, to “hundreds” after Helm’s Deep. Between 2005 and 2007, the Dictionary found itself in the middle of legal battles due to allegations of defamatory and illegal content and was even shut down temporarily by court decisions on multiple occasions. As the community’s reputation was questioned, the Turkish media distanced itself further from the Dictionary. After the batch recruitment of 2002, the number of citations of dictionary content had risen steadily despite criticisms. However, two years after Helm’s Deep, media’s interest in the dictionary had diminished drastically, let alone show signs of recovery as it did before after the 2002 batch recruitment. In 2006, the total media appearances fell to 33, from 54 in 2005 and 58 in 2004. Although the number of criticisms also dropped, from 16 in 2005 to 4 in 2006, citations decreased from 33 to 24 despite the presence of many more writers and material in the dictionary. Cases of praise fell to an all-time low of two, even lower than in 1999 when most of the Turkish media and public were not even aware of the community.

DISCUSSIONS

In the case of Sour Dictionary, the founder’s changing preferences regarding member recruitment, content quality assurance and enactments of IT’s growth affordances led to different outcomes in each epoch. A comparison of each epoch shows that the success or failure of a particular governance configuration in an epoch depended
on whether it could respond to the ambiguity and contestability of the quality criteria in artistic production. As mentioned in the theory section, cultural production is a continuum that can range from a basis in an artistic logic, to an economic logic. If the governance configurations employed do not match the dominant logic of production in the community, then problems of coherence can arise and the image of an entire community can be damaged. The case of Sour Dictionary illustrates this across the three epochs and highlights the need for the right type and capacity of quality assurance in order to balance the outcomes of different member recruitment methods and enactments of IT’s growth affordances.

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![Artistic logic](Artistic logic) ![Economic Logic](Economic Logic)

**Figure 9:** Application of Quality Criteria in Three Epochs

**Matching Type of Quality Assurance with the Logic of Cultural Production:** As shown in Figure 9, as the community moved from Epoch 1 to 3, its approach to quality moved increasingly from an artistic logic of cultural production to an economic logic, despite the fact that participants were engaged in generation of artistic content.
throughout this time. This move appears to have had negative consequences for the community, suggesting that if the artistic values of originality and creativity are to be maintained, then each contribution may need to be assessed individually according to its unique qualities, i.e. the “case-by-case method”, which takes time and effort. In Epoch 1 there were no clear quality criteria and explicit rules to guide participation in the Dictionary, yet despite this absence, community members were able to collaborate “intuitively”, with negligible conflicts. In Epoch 2, with the creation of violation categories, explicit rules began to be formulated so that those responsible for quality assurance would be more consistent in their assessment of contributions. Although this caused some disagreements and brought to the foreground the contestability of quality criteria in artistic production, artistic values were nevertheless protected due to the flexibility of the application of these rules: the moderators often overlooked the “mistakes” of skilled participants when they violated some of these rules, relying instead on the understanding that the vague criterion of “writing well” was superior. This enabled new creative expression to continue to flourish. In Epoch 3, however, the quality assurance team could no longer honor the diversity of unique contributions. Despite the founder’s recognition of rule-setting in cultural production as a moving target, he implemented a zero tolerance approach in which the quality assurance team applied violation categories with no flexibility. Moreover, as the unit of error detection and elimination moved from “contribution” to “contributor”, generalizations about writers began to be made from a few of their entries. Hence potentially different things were treated as if they were the same, suggesting an economic logic of production. Indeed, the
“zero tolerance” policy in the community at this time resembled an assembly line quality detection system, rather than one of cultural production.

Epoch 3 in particular demonstrates the futility of trying to impose strict quality criteria in order to achieve coherence. In the Sour Dictionary, application of strict quality and similarity criteria caused a rapid loss of coherence, accompanied by the following two outcomes: First, the imposition of strict criteria meant that existing members who had previously been governed by flexibility were expected to switch their production to a “one size fits all” mindset, such that some of their artistic preferences were no longer viewed as legitimate. Secondly, strict quality criteria surprisingly enabled new forms of contribution because there was still room for much creativity within these constraints. In Sour Dictionary, many newcomers decided to satisfy the strict explicit rules as a minimum requirement but built upon them to generate an entirely new set of products with political rather than artistic content. In summary, strict rules split the community members between “oldies” whose works were endangered in terms of their authority, and “newbies” who worked around the strict rules imposed on them to bring a new identity to the community.

How do these observations compare to the findings of governance research in OSS communities? Do OSS communities experience similar tensions when their governance parameters do not match the expected type of production? In almost all OSS studies, the potentially versatile conceptual toolkit of “governance” has been restricted to how goods with well-defined functionalities, i.e. software, can be produced more efficiently (Demil and Lecocq 2006, Markus 2007). This is not surprising given that in
OSS communities, design is ultimately aimed at fulfilling a function, the performance of which can eventually be verified and compared to alternative solutions. According to the IEEE Standard Glossary (p.60), quality is defined by whether the system accomplishes its specified requirements, and quality assurance is a planned and systematic pattern of actions to achieve this. Therefore, although informalisms in OSS communities have been acknowledged (Scacchi 2003), mismatches between governance and the final product are observed when clear specifications or systematic quality assurance processes are needed but are absent (Noll 2008, Scacchi 2009). Sour Dictionary provides an opposite case, where governance parameters aimed at efficiency are imposed on an artistic community that does not value clarity highly, and so displays the consequences of such a mismatch in terms of reduced coherence and popularity of the community. OSS community participants’ knowledge of syntax and project requirements is analogous to the rules-based knowledge of moderators and snitches in Sour Dictionary. However, instead of creating consensus, the explication of such criteria in Sour Dictionary served to make the inherent contestability of quality criteria in artistic production more visible, highlighting the non-comparability of each unique contribution and encouraging workarounds to the rules. This does not mean that quality assessment cannot be accomplished in artistic production: as we saw in Epochs 1 and 2, artists were able to operate either without explicit rules, or with explicit rules applied flexibly, due to the guidance of broader, non-formulated values.

Matching Capacity of Quality Assurance with Growth in Community: The case of Sour Dictionary does not suggest that growth, even if it is very rapid, conflicts with the
nature of artistic production. Nor does the growth of a community of artistic production need be slow, such as it was in Epoch 1 due to the reference-based recruitment method used. The study does show, however, that the capacity of quality assurance does matter, and that it needs to match the growth rate of members and new content if the values of artistic production are to be maintained. In the case of Sour Dictionary, across the three epochs, we see movement from a highly controlled membership growth rate, to one that becomes increasingly unmanageable due to limits of quality assurance capacity. In fact, the type of quality assurance employed is intricately tied to the presence or expectations of capacity to manage content. In Sour Dictionary, the maintenance of an artistic logic meant that automation and generalization were inadequate means of quality control. Therefore, the ways that the community scaled up in size needed to be assessed in terms of – and had consequences depending on - whether there was sufficient quality assurance capacity in ways that could provide the flexibility needed for assessing artistic goods.

Across the three epochs, things got increasingly out of hand in the Sour Dictionary. In Epoch 1, supervision was restricted to a few moderators only, but given the slow growth rate through reference-based recruitment, the content was manageable. In Epoch 2, the growth rate temporarily exploded with batch recruitment and caused initial quality concerns, but by utilizing a sufficient number of experienced writers to perform case-by-case assessment of each contribution, the community was able to manage the growth its recruitment change caused. In Epoch 3, the zero-policy approach taken was a direct response to the extreme workload of the quality assurance team, with subsequent problems arising from the inability of this team to assess each product on its
unique merits. In the absence of sufficient capacity for monitoring content and coherence, the founder desperately imposed similarity criteria on entries that were intended to be different, only to discover one size does not fit all in cultural production, and “one size” is often manipulated to create workarounds.

In OSS communities, growth is controlled due to the availability of clear means to demonstrate of competence, which is useful for gatekeepers, and by clear modular entry points (Lerner and Tirole 2002; von Krogh et al. 2003), which newcomers use to match their skills to technical demands when they join. As opposed to this arguably efficient means of newcomer (self) selection in software development, the absence of clear criteria for artistic competence can attract newcomers with very diverse skills and interests. This puts additional demands on quality assurance capacity, because “wrong” participants can leak into the community and may be hard to identify when they make “mistakes”.

IT’s Role in Member Recruitment and Quality Assurance in Cultural Production:

Throughout the three epochs, IT’s role in enabling growth in membership and content generation was always central to the founder’s decision outcomes. However, the founder’s acknowledgment of the nature of artistic production, and the interpretive human effort needed to maintain coherence in it, meant that in many occasions he did not feel obliged to use it just because he could.

Even then, when IT was used, it was for growth by replication and efficiency. Hardware upgrades are clearly of this nature, used as they were to ‘increase page views within a certain period of time’, to ‘provide many participants with an ability to produce
content simultaneously’ or to ‘allow visitors to receive quicker response from the server’. Similarly, when he built his managerial interface, he created a capability for admitting many newcomers at once. As the member recruitment methods moved from reference-based to batch-based, IT was increasingly involved as an enabler. In fact, the batch member recruitment of 17,000 new members in 2005 would have been practically impossible in a setting not supported by IT.

The need for human interpretation to assess the quality of cultural goods in this case highlights a fundamental difference between IT’s affordances for creating artistic goods, and for managing the quality of such goods. IT can provide a platform upon which artists can create a vast variety of goods, within representational constraints, and with no predetermined set of right or wrong interpretations. In this sense, IT is a very plastic tool for artistic work, with the text-based infrastructure of Sour Dictionary being just one example among many. However, using IT for quality management constitutes an entirely different problem, requiring as it does a predetermined formulation of specific relationships for “interpreting” artistic products as good or bad. With each instantiation of a given formula, products tend to become more similar, more repetitive, more predictable and “economic”. Moreover, since there is no need to codify something that will not be repeated anyway, IT does not need to be -and in the words of the founder of Sour Dictionary, cannot be used for automated means of quality control in cultural production. He stated that use of automated IT-based quality control mechanisms for error detection and possible elimination, such as crawlers or bots, was impossible due to the difficulties of semantic analysis of Turkish and the creative use of it in the community. This is in
stark contrast to the successful use of automated testing tools in many OSS projects, due to the well-defined syntactic relationships between the elements of programming languages. The testing process in Perl, for instance, can automatically identify hundreds of thousands of errors without the need of a single “eyeball”. In Perl, automated “smoke tests” are conducted regularly in which code is downloaded, compiled and reports with detected errors are distributed. Similarly, the Linux kernel is subject to thousands of tests before release, all of which are automatic once coded. Thus, Raymond’s (1999) statement that “given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow” already occurs automatically in OSS development, a luxury that artistic production may and perhaps should never have.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have some general implications for how to manage the growth of online communities of artistic cultural production. Artistic production is a unique setting in that there is no clear way to assess whether a product works well or not; governance methods, therefore, should recognize and adapt to the ambiguity and contestability of quality criteria. Quality criteria are fluid, flexible and contestable in artistic production, and learning to operate in such an environment takes time rather than an adherence to standardized rules. Thus, managers of artistic production communities may find themselves consciously needing to resist the temptation to grow, often enabled by IT, and instead allow newcomers the time and patience to adjust to the “intuitive” ways of such communities; “to hang around a while”, as one of the writers mentioned.

There are some exciting areas of future research suggested by this study. First, the
relationships between the various outcomes of member recruitment and quality assurance methods need to be more closely examined, particularly \textit{in light of different degrees of popularity}. In this study, I focused on the consequences of different member recruitment and quality assurance methods on the popularity of a community, but the reverse relationship also bears close examination. For instance, how do quality assurance methods change as a community grows in popularity and its cost-per-mistake increases with this visibility? Moreover, as popularity increases, the time window available to a community for correcting mistakes is likely to shrink as audiences follow it more closely. An understanding of what governance mechanisms are most effective in enabling online communities to win this “race” can provide valuable insights to scholars and practitioners.

I hope that this study on the particularities of cultural production rather than economic production motivates other researchers to turn their attention to more and varied types of information goods, such as personal opinions and value judgments. I suggest that traditional views of online communities as avenues of goal-oriented collaboration may represent only the tip of the iceberg, the rest of which is a messy territory of personal declarations of moral, cultural, aesthetic and political preferences that are contestable and difficult to rationalize. For instance, while social network platforms such as Facebook or Twitter are not pure avenues of cultural production, they are nevertheless filled with content that heavily informs the cultural preferences of many individuals. How content and participation are regulated by managers and participants in such platforms are crucial questions to ask if we are to understand how we construct and
deconstruct acceptable cultural practices online.
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Screenshot of Sour Dictionary as of May 2001

- Control buttons, search functionality and login form
- Entries for the word "welcome"
- Topics of the day
- Nicknames of writers and date of entry contribution
## Appendix B: List of Topics Used for Thematic Labeling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Entry-Range</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Entry Topics</td>
<td>0-10 Entries</td>
<td>Light bulb, Television, Samsun, Capitalism, Rice, Duck, Dido, Marriage, Hakki Bulut, Mehmet Ali Erbil, Hurriyet, Book, Physics, Bullet, Shoe, Rebel</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid Entry Topics</td>
<td>10-20 Entries</td>
<td>Atom, Egg, Britney Spears, World, Star Wars, Microsoft, God, Apple, Revolution, Hotmail, To Cry, Properties of a Good Fart, Selam Sahin, RTUK Police, Paranoid Lovers, You May Kiss the Bride, Biased Commentators</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Entry Topics</td>
<td>20+ Entries</td>
<td>Legal Drugs, The Matrix, Istanbul, Father, Secret Garden, Cat, Pita, Married... with Children, Napster, Fight Club, Izmir, Galatasaray, Who Wants to be a Millionaire, Dune, Amiga, Salvador Dali, Murder Weapon</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Exemplar Codes of Advice to Newcomers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Advice Attribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not push entries until the morning. Go sleep. You may have something better to do. Avoid eating garlic and onion in the morning. Wash the back of your ears thoroughly while taking a bath.</td>
<td>Specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not think this is a chatting environment. We like strangers here, but to some extent. 'Information flows endlessly but inconsequential talk is ever present' is not our slogan, but you treat as if it is. Look at the entries in the morning before you brush your teeth. Read newspapers everyday and do not ignore reading books either.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not race words because we ran those laps multiple times.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never whisper when walking in front of the Sour Dictionary cemetery.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do as these advice givers say but do not do what they do.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treat the newcomers well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notice that all of these don't do this and don't do that can be summarized as &quot;caring&quot;. We are trying to build a crooked house of cards here. Don't try to put stones on the top of it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read before you write.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not be arrogant. Write what you know. You may be a researcher but do not exaggerate. At first, read about 40-50 topics and understand what the conversation is.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix D: Entry Codification of Literary Style (Openness to Multiple Interpretations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Connotation</th>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Openness to Multiple Interpretations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dilko</td>
<td>virtual penis. Toy of the lonely woman in heat.</td>
<td>Appreciative</td>
<td>Metaphorical</td>
<td>Colloquial</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faruk K</td>
<td>the slow music god with crappy Turkish lyrics</td>
<td>Depreciative</td>
<td>Factual</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasan Cemal</td>
<td>former editor-in-chief of Cumhuriyet, writer, journalist</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Allusive</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atom</td>
<td>super hot, small round pepper</td>
<td>Sarcastic</td>
<td>Colloquial</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>the imaginary friend who helps the lonely with his powers and strengths by hearing and listening to them all the time.</td>
<td>Appreciative</td>
<td>Metaphorical</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fidel Castro</td>
<td>the portrait of 24 hour monologues that stand tall without collapsing (one can stand tall after collapsing, too) and a revolution.</td>
<td>Depreciative</td>
<td>Factual</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehmet Ali Erbil</td>
<td>He is right, too. It’s not easy to make money out of gambling.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Allusive</td>
<td>Colloquial</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All codes that are not solely literal are considered to carry elements of openness to multiple interpretations. A metaphorical style does not clearly state the ways, with which it relates to its target, whereas allusion does not even fully indicate its source. This is regardless of the value connotation and the language that are used.
APPENDIX E: Summary Table for Analysis of Epochs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reference-based recruitment based on recommendations of existing members to aid like-mindedness and similarity of skills among writers.</td>
<td>Introduction of applications followed by queueing and batch recruitment, i.e. the admission of many newcomers at once without assessment. Newcomers about half the size of the existing community and admitted within one month.</td>
<td>Batch recruitment based on the admission of many newcomers at once without assessment. Newcomers about twice the size of the existing community and admitted overnight.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casewise method based on assessing each product by its unique quality. Used in the absence of standardized guidelines. Formulation of rules attempted and abandoned due to inconstancy.</td>
<td>Peer-reviewed case-by-case method begins as some participants become &quot;snitches&quot;. Formulated rules implemented, but interpreted differently and contested by participants and applied flexibly.</td>
<td>Peer-reviewed case-by-case method continues, but the unit of error detection changes from contributions to contributors due to efficiency advantages. No increase in snitches despite massive growth. Rules are applied with zero tolerance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit of error detection elimination is a contribution, i.e. a topic or entry.</td>
<td>Unit of error detection elimination is a contribution, i.e. a topic or entry.</td>
<td>Unit of error detection elimination is a contributor, i.e. a writer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notepad database requiring manual update during which the community closes to contributions. Then switching to a more advanced database software. Growth potential of IT is not enacted due to founder's preference for &quot;controlled&quot; growth.</td>
<td>Tweaking of functionality accompanied by efficiency improvements in hardware. Growth potential realized with the help of a new interface used to manage the queue of newcomers. Massive growth enabled by a click of a button.</td>
<td>Overall functionalities of the website remain mostly unchanged and hardware upgraded after batch recruitment. Growth potential realized with the use of queue management interface. Massive growth enabled by a click of a button.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow and incremental growth of like-minded participants. Sense of ownership of the community and negligible internal conflict.</td>
<td>Initial conflicts between earlier participants and newcomers due to differences in quality. As the community closes to new writers and quality assurance intensifies, complaints diminish and conflicts disappear.</td>
<td>Lasting conflicts as earlier participants believe in irreparable loss of quality. Banning of many newcomers create concerns of unfairness. Newcomers comprise the majority and change the identity of the dictionary.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgment of community and many cases of praise by major national media outlets.</td>
<td>Temporary wave of criticism about the presence insula comes after batch recruitment, but diminishes when community stops admitting new members and quality assurance intensifies. Strong growth in popularity as media heavily cites the community's products.</td>
<td>Temporary wave of criticism about the presence of insults and quality of content followed by media's distancing from the community. Website shut down multiple times due to presence of illegal content.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Mustafa Kerem Arsal has earned his B.A. from Marmara University in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2002 in the field of Management Information Systems (Wirtschaftsinformatik), where he graduated with Honors, ranked 5th out of 52 graduates. In 2005, he completed his M.B.A. at Clemson University, with a concentration in Information Systems before he was admitted to the D.B.A. program in Information Systems at the School of Management in Boston University. There, he taught senior level undergraduate students in the subject of electronic commerce for two years, after which he was awarded the “Outstanding Teaching by a Doctoral Student in 2011”.

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Aside from his academic background, Mr. Arsal has worked for Pyramid Research, a subsidiary of United Business Media, for three years between 2009 and 2012 as a senior analyst, where he conducted research in the field of telecommunications and information technologies in emerging markets, with a focus on the regions of Africa and the Middle East. Aside from his continuous interactions with global telecommunications operators, network vendors and service providers, he produced research that appeared in global professional conferences and panels, including Fiber-to-the-Home Council Conference and the Africa Conference held by Harvard University Business School.