The Virtual Community - Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier

About The Virtual Community

The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier is a book written by Howard Rheingold and published by in 1994, and later revised in 2000.

In his book, Rheingold iterates his experience as the “First Citizen” of the Internet, describing and analyzing in great detail the then-infant concept of the virtual community with the aim of bringing to more people “the potential importance of cyberspace to political liberties and the ways virtual communities are likely to change our experience of the real world, as individuals and communities” (Rheingold, 2000). The significance of Rheingold’s book is the definition he had set for the term virtual community:

Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace.

Rheingold introduced the book with an anecdote of his first experience with the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link, or better known as WELL. The WELL is considered as one of the earliest forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) platforms which allowed users from all parts of the world to communicate with each other via online conversations and electronic mail. From his observations of WELLites (the virtual identities in the WELL), Rheingold made several conclusions in his book about the various social behaviours of people online. This included how “whenever CMC technology becomes available to people anywhere, they inevitably build virtual communities with it, just as microorganisms inevitably create colonies” (Rheingold, 2000).

Chapters in The Virtual Community

- Introduction
- Chapter 1: The Heart of the WELL
- Chapter 2: Daily Life in Cyberspace: How the Computerized Counterculture Built a New Kind of Place
- Chapter 3: Visionaries and Convergences: The Accidental History of the Net
- Chapter 4: Grassroots Groupminds
- Chapter 5: Multi-user Dungeons and Alternate Identities
- Chapter 6: Real-time Tribes
- Chapter 7: Japan and the Net
- Chapter 8: Telematique and Messageries Rose: A Tale of Two Virtual Communities
- Chapter 9: Electronic Frontiers and Online Activists
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Read The Virtual Community online

A free electronic version of the book, separated into individual chapters, is made available by Howard Rheingold on his personal web site.

References
