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2010 : April 2010 - Emerging Research Fronts : Jasjit Singh on Collaborative & Social Networking

EMERGING RESEARCH FRONTS - 2010

April 2010



Jasjit Singh talks with *ScienceWatch.com* and answers a few questions about this month's Emerging Research Front Paper in the field of Economics & Business.



Article: Collaborative networks as determinants of knowledge diffusion patterns

Authors: **Singh, J**

Journal: MANAGE SCI, 51 (5): 756-770, MAY 2005

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SW: Why do you think your paper is highly cited?

The question of how social networks influence flow of knowledge is not new. Yet there have been relatively few studies rigorously examining this link in the context of geographic patterns of knowledge flow.

My paper was one of the early contributions systematically using rich individual-level data (on inventors of patents) to examine the link between interpersonal ties (that inventors form through collaboration) and the subsequent patterns of knowledge flow.

SW: Does it describe a new discovery, methodology, or synthesis of knowledge?

The basic idea behind the paper is a straightforward synthesis of two important streams of research, which have in the past evolved somewhat independently.

On the one hand, studies on social networks have emphasized flow of knowledge through such networks without caring too much about the dimension of geography in looking at this link.

On the other hand, studies examining geographic patterns of knowledge flow (particularly showing a geographic localization of it) have, for the most part, not directly examined the role of the underlying networks. My paper was an attempt to more closely connect these two streams of literature.

SW: Would you summarize the significance of your paper in layman's terms?

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The conceptual point is very simple. The reason information or knowledge flow tends to be restricted within regional and firm boundaries is that people within a geographic region and/or within the same firm tend to be better connected in the underlying social networks (i.e., are a shorter "social distance").

While my paper is not the first to make this claim conceptually, its real contribution is examining this empirically in a rigorous way.

SW: How did you become involved in this research and were any particular problems encountered along the way?

This paper is largely an outcome of my Ph.D. research done at Harvard—as a student in Business Economics. I found this research area conceptually really interesting, but also intellectually fun since I was also able to use my prior Computer Science education (from IIT-Delhi and Georgia Tech-Atlanta) to deal with the algorithmic challenges of working with a network graph comprised of almost two million individuals!

SW: Where do you see your research leading in the future?

I am continuing to work on several related themes at INSEAD.

In one project (jointly working with Lee Fleming from HBS and Matt Marx from MIT), I am looking at disentangling the extent to which the effects of geography on knowledge flow are explained best as the effect of distance, of political or regional boundaries, or of social connectedness.

In another project (jointly working with Ajay Agrawal from the University of Toronto), I am examining the role of geographic agglomeration and technological diversity of inputs in generating high-impact innovations.

In yet another project (jointly working with Morten Hansen from the University of California, Berkeley, and Joel Podolny from Apple), I am specifically looking at differences between different kinds of individuals in their ability to leverage networks to access information within firms.

All my research papers are available [online](#) for anyone who is interested.

SW: Do you foresee any social or political implications for your research?

Definitely. But I work with secondary databases. And extrapolating from imperfect measures as well as lack of random assignment in such databases to make normative prescriptions can also be hazardous, so I am always cautious in drawing implications for practice.

Nevertheless, my hope is to complement this research with other research methods to move towards providing more definitive prescriptions at some stage. But I am not there yet!

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