NYU Stern School of Business
Department of Information, Operations & Management Sciences
INFORMATION SYSTEMS RESEARCH SEMINAR

TOPIC: Measuring Happiness, Health, and Social Stories
SPEAKER: Peter Sheridan Dodds
DATE: Thursday, November 7th, 2013
TIME: 4:00-5:30pm
PLACE: KMC 4-110

ABSTRACT

In this talk, I will report on a wide array of findings obtained through our real-time, remote-sensing, non-invasive, text-based `hedonometer'---an instrument for measuring positivity in written expression, now housed online at hedonometer.org. I will show how we have improved our methods to allow us to robustly explore collective, dynamical patterns of happiness and other emotions found in massive text corpora including the global social network Twitter, song lyrics, blogs, political speeches, and news sources. From the viewpoint of Twitter, I will report on global levels of temporal, spatial (cities and states), demographic, and social variations in happiness and information levels, as well as evidence of emotional synchrony and contagion, and how happiness changes with movement patterns. Where possible, I will demonstrate that our real-time measure agrees well with various other metrics. I will also discuss how word usage in tweets connects with other features such as food consumption and state-level obesity rates, and can be used to uncover stories in social media. Finally, I will present evidence for how 10 diverse natural languages appear to contain a striking frequency-independent positive bias, describing how this phenomenon plays a key role in our instrument's performance, and how it more deeply reflects human nature.

BIO

Peter Sheridan Dodds is a Professor at the University of Vermont (UVM) working on system-level problems in many fields, ranging from sociology to physics. He is Director of UVM's Complex Systems Center, co-Director of UVM's Computational Story Lab, a visiting faculty fellow at the Vermont Advanced Computing Core, and is appointed to the Department of Mathematics and Statistics. He maintains general research and teaching interests in complex systems and networks with a current focus on sociotechnical and psychological phenomena including collective emotional states, contagion, and stories. His methods encompass large-scale data collection and analysis, large-scale sociotechnical experiments, and the formulation, analysis, and simulation of theoretical models. Dodds's training is in theoretical physics, mathematics, and electrical engineering with extensive formal postdoctoral and research experience in the social sciences. Dodds is currently funded by an NSF CAREER grant awarded by the Social and Economic Sciences Directorate.