

How will we interact with the #WebWeWant?

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Position paper

A socio-technical protocol for the Web

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The Web is a ecosystem of machines and people interacting, and these interactions form and produce the various forms of Web activity. Whilst it might seem that the affordances of the technology enable us to create and realise various different types of activity (online shopping, social networking), the technology itself is socially shaped and developed. Although not explicitly stated or defined, this co-constructive relationship between technology and human activity is the *underlying* socio-technical protocols of the Web, it is the protocol that exists (but not via design) to enable the Web to grow, and ultimately, function. It is important to note that the word *protocol* is not to be considered deterministic, but rather as a 'fuzzy set of interactions' that have evolved alongside the technologies and human creativity.

When we analyse, describe and predict changes about the Web, we often gloss over the social components of Web activity, and tend to steer towards more positivist approaches to measuring change, growth, or decline. However, what if we were to define such insights by examining it via a socio-technical protocol, or better still, can we derive characteristics of socio-technical interaction on the Web in order to better understand our interactions and intentions? Rather than trying to build upon existing methods of modelling and prediction, can a new form of analysis be derived?

Research is already showing that there exists replicable patterns of activity on the Web (take for example work related to network structures, burst patterns, and communication diffusion), is it possible to take this technologically focused approach and reconsider the social?

Ultimately, the future of the Web relies on both people and technology, and the socio-technical protocol that emerges from their interactions.