


Online Communities

The concept of computer-mediated community






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(Class A)

Online Communities


What is community?

- λ The condition of sharing, having things in common or being alike in some way

(Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary, 1995)

Online Communities




Is community emergent from online interaction?

◇ Yes!

- λ According to Rheingold (1994), the “ability to network, gain knowledge, or find communion within cyberspace is the social glue that binds formerly isolated individuals into a community”.

(Fernbeck & Thompson, “Virtual Communities: Abort, Retry, Failure?”, 1995)

Online Communities



Implications for traditional communities?

- λ “They [virtual communities] are in part a response to the hunger for community that has followed the **disintegration of traditional communities around the world.**” – Rheingold (1992)
- λ “Rather than providing a replacement for the crumbling **public realm**, virtual communities are actually **contributing to its decline**...keeping people indoors and off the streets...people who hide from real life and spend their whole life goofing off in cyberspace.” – McClellan (1994)


(Fernbeck & Thompson, “Virtual Communities: Abort, Retry, Failure?”, 1995)

Online Communities

What are online communities?

- λ AKA. Virtual Communities
- λ A group of people that may or may not primarily or initially communicate or interact via the Internet
(Wikipedia: Virtual Community, 2007)
- λ “Global village” – Marshall McLuhan ◇ annulment of space and time
- λ “Republic of Technology” – Boorstin ◇ a shared utopian experience
(Fernbeck & Thompson, “Virtual Communities: Abort, Retry, Failure?”, 1995)

Online Communities



What are online communities? (cont'd)

- λ “With crushing inevitability, the advance of technology brings nations together and narrows the differences between the experiences of their people.” - Boorstin

(Fernbeck & Thompson, “Virtual Communities: Abort, Retry, Failure?”, 1995)

Online Communities

How are they formed?

- λ "When people carry on public discussions long enough with *sufficient human feeling*, to form webs of personal relationships."
 - Howard Rheingold (coined "virtual community")



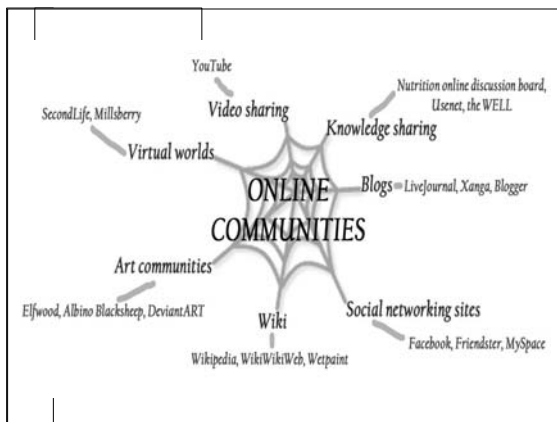
(Wikipedia: Virtual Community, 2007)

Online Communities

Examples of online communities

- λ Social networking sites (e.g. IRC, MySpace, YouTube)
 - YouTube 
 - myspace.com 
- λ Discussion boards 
- λ Art communities 
- λ MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons)
- λ Ethnical communities

(Wikipedia: Virtual Community, 2007)



Online Communities



Membership Lifecycle proposed by Amy Jo Kim (2000)

- λ Visitors or lurkers
- λ Novice (participates in community life)
- λ Regular (having contributed for a period of time)
- λ Leader
- λ Elder



(Wikipedia: Virtual Community, 2007)

Online Communities

Motivations for contributing by Peter Kollock in *The Economics of Online Cooperation: Gifts and Public Goods in Cyberspace*

- λ Anticipated reciprocity
- λ Increased recognition
- λ Sense of efficacy
- λ Attachment
- λ Need
- λ Side-effect
- λ Communion (Mark Smith, 1992. *Voices from the WELL: The Logic of the Virtual Commons*) ∩ WELL = Whole Earth 'Electronic Link



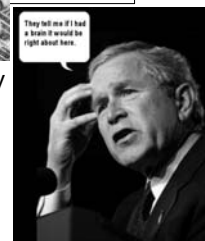
"Get the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog!"

(Wikipedia: Virtual Community, 2007)

Online Communities

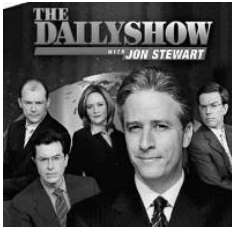
Concerns

- λ Affordability
- λ Intellectual accessibility
- λ Availability of time



(Fernbeck & Thompson, "Virtual Communities: Abort, Retry, Failure?", 1995)

Online Communities



The Daily Show's
Trend spotting:
Social Networking



- λ Internet social network service
- λ Founded by Jonathan Abrams in 2002
- λ Based on the Circle of Friends technique
- λ Demonstrates the Small world phenomenon

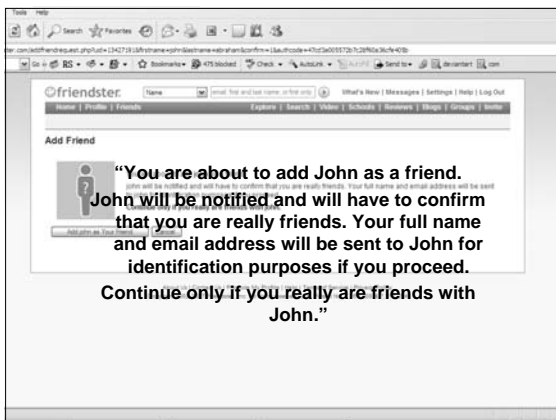
Friendster. (2007). In: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Retrieved March 14, 2007, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friendster>



What is the small world phenomenon?

- λ The hypothesis that everyone in the world can be reached through a short chain of social acquaintances


Small world phenomenon. (2007). In: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Retrieved March 14, 2007, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small_world_phenomenon



Question:

How many of you have people on your "Friends" list whom you have not met in person/do not even talk to?

Please RAISE your hand...Don't be shy.



λ Friendster expected its users to add/list their ACTUAL friends.

λ This did not happen.

λ Assumption: If people are friends on these sites, they must be friends in other contexts as well.

Boyd, D. (2006). Friends, Friendsters, and Top 8. Retrieved from: http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue11_12/boyd/index.html

Who do users add?

- λ People who seem interesting
- λ People who are attractive/cool
- λ People who can help expand one's social circle of online friends
- λ Fake profiles
- λ Celebrity profiles
- λ Commercial profiles
- λ Actual friends and family




Fakesters

- λ Fake profiles
- λ Giant Squid
- λ Favorite music: Wailing of damned souls
- λ Favorite movie: 20,000 leagues under the sea
- λ Interests: capsizing ships, eating human flesh, destroying corporate culture and mocking Jon Abrams

"Faking Out Friendster" by Katharine Mieszkowski (2003).

Fakesters

- λ Other fakesters on Friendster:
 - God
 - Beer
 - Drunk Squirrel
 - Hippie Jesus
 - Malcolm X
 - and more than a dozen Homer Simpsons



"Faking Out Friendster" by Katharine Mieszkowski (2003).

Video!



The Myth of Friendster

Recall: Online Identity

- λ Easy to be someone you are not
- λ Make and sustain an overwhelmingly positive impression
- λ Identities on online communities become a selective self-presentation

Griffin, E. (2006). Social information processing theory of Joseph Walther. A first look at communication theory, 6th edition, pp. 142-155. McGraw-Hill Companies.

Commercial Profile

The screenshot shows a Friendster profile for a user named 'iPod Lover'. The profile includes a profile picture, a bio with details like 'Male, 26, Single', 'Member Since: Nov 2004', and 'Location: Singapore'. It also features a section for 'How you're connected' showing connections to other users, a 'Send Message' button, and a 'Send a Smile' button. There are also options to 'Add as Friend', 'Forward to Friend', 'Invite to Group', 'Add Comment', and 'Add Bookmark'. The profile is categorized as 'Friendster Singapore' and '100% Bonus Ringtone & Friendster Complimentary Polyphonic Ringtone!'. At the bottom, there is a 'Sell to Overseas Market?' link.

Friendster or Strangerster

- λ Strangers—someone you do not know and is unfamiliar with.
- λ Acquaintances—someone you know, but only casually.
- λ Friends—someone you know well, someone you like, and someone whom you feel a close personal bond.

Koester & Lustig. (2005). Intercultural Competence. Pearson, 5th Edition.

Friending: Connect VS Collect

- λ “Collectors” ignore the actual meaning of friendship
- λ They confuse it with “acquaintances”

The diagram shows a central circular node connected to several other circular nodes, representing a network or social structure.

Collector: ECP Skaters

The screenshot shows a Friendster profile for a user named 'ECP Skaters'. The profile includes a profile picture, a bio with details like 'Male, 27, Single', 'Interested in: Friends, Activity Partners', 'Member Since: Nov 2005', and 'Location: Singapore'. It also features a section for 'How you're connected' showing connections to other users, a 'Send Message' button, and a 'Send a Smile' button. There are also options to 'Add as Friend', 'Forward to Friend', 'Invite to Group', 'Add Comment', and 'Add Bookmark'. The profile is categorized as 'Friendster Singapore' and 'ECP Skater's's VRG.'. At the bottom, there is a 'View Blog' button.

Collector: ECP Skaters

The screenshot shows a Friendster profile for a user named 'ECP Skaters' displaying a list of 'Recently Added Friends (477)'. The list includes names like Carol, Carolyn, Carrie, Cassie, Catherine, Celeste, Celine, Charlene, and Charmaine, each with a small profile picture and a 'send message' button. The list is paginated, showing '91 - 120 of 477'.

friendster
www.friendster.com

- λ “Social networking sites are not digital spaces disconnected from other social venues...”
- λ ...it is a modeling of one aspect of participants' social worlds and that model is evaluated in other social contexts.”

Boyd, D. (2006). Friends, Friendsters, and Top 8. Retrieved from: http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue11_12/boyd/index.html



Reputation Management

What is reputation management?

- λ The process of tracking an entity's actions and other entities' opinions about those actions; reporting on those actions and opinion; and reacting to that report creating a feedback loop.

("Wikipedia: Reputation management", 2007)

Reputation Management

- λ Real-world communities
- λ Small towns, Big cities

	Views
2,823	
1,103	
1,829	
1,068	
1,932	
150	
1,975	
2,446	
2,969	
225	
86	

Video!

- λ eBay, MySpace, Friendster, Wikipedia

Who's Viewed Me?
53 views since 10/3/2007
290 Friends
53475 2nd Degree Friends

The Kings of MySpace

("Wikipedia: Reputation management", 2007)

Reputation Management

Search Engine Reputation Management (SERM)

- λ Tactics employed by companies to proactively shield their brands from damaging content that result from search engine queries
- λ Why is it important? ◊ growing popularity and development of search engines and consumer generated media

("Wikipedia: Reputation management", 2007)

What are Online forums?

- λ It is a facility on the internet for holding discussions and posting user generated content, or the web application software used to provide the facility

Internet Forum. (2007). In: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_forum.

What are online forums?

- λ Composed of a number of member-written threads.
 - Each thread entails a discussion or conversation in the form of a series of member-written posts.
 - Remain saved on the forum website for future reading indefinitely or until deletion by a moderator.

Internet Forum. (2007). In: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_forum.

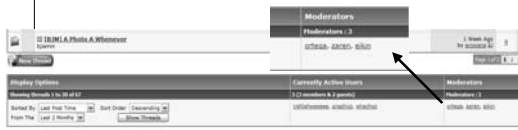
Thread

Chronological order

Topic	Author	Time Ago	Replies
7. Toshiba Ex-3 camera problem.	erikmoores	23 Minutes Ago	1
12. Still between SDR6X and SDR6X7	erikmoores	26 Minutes Ago	2
13. what video would you be using?? (1 1 1)	erikmoores	41 Minutes Ago	1
14. 2008 online forum? (1 1 1)	erikmoores	48 Minutes Ago	2
15. Computer or Laptop?	erikmoores	1 Hour Ago	1
16. Resolution Issues	erikmoores	1 Hour Ago	1
17. need help regarding Nikon lens compatibility	erikmoores	1 Hour Ago	1
18. Still not sure about 150D...??	erikmoores	2 Hours Ago	1
19. Where to keep...Flash? (1 1 1)	erikmoores	3 Hours Ago	1
20. White Screen?	erikmoores	4 Hours Ago	1
21. 150D vs 150D	erikmoores	5 Hours Ago	1
22. White balance	erikmoores	6 Hours Ago	1
23. Full Canon 450D or Nikon D60? (1 1 1)	erikmoores	8 Hours Ago	1
24. Digital VR lens or standard lens?	erikmoores	8 Hours Ago	1

Online forum management

- λ An online forum is being managed by the forum administrator and moderator
- λ Administrator have the ability to edit, delete, move or otherwise modify any thread, ban or create members
- λ Moderators are assistants to the administrator and have lesser managing abilities



Types of Online Forums and their characteristics

- λ Public forums
 - Not all requires registration
 - Anyone can post discussions and ideas
 - Anonymity and pseudonymity are present
- λ Private forums
 - Requires registration and email addresses for validation
 - Normally limited to the people within your circle of friends
 - Everybody knows each other, no anonymity

Online forums

- λ Interests forums
 - People who share similar interests, cars, computers, etc.
 - Can be either public or private
- λ Chat forums
 - People talk just about anything
 - Are usually public forums, IRC etc.



Online forums as a gift economy

- λ Updates people with recent information
- λ Shares ideas and contacts with one another which is useful and beneficial
- λ Like a garage sale, members can sell their items by posting, like advertising
- λ Buying and selling is common



Communication in Online forums

- λ Forum contains many different boards that direct you to a sub-forum. In each sub forum may be a place for posting, with the new topics at the top, with a signifier that a new post has been made in the thread. (*"Internet Forums," In: Wikipedia, 2007*)
- λ Members choose the topic they want and type messages where they then post on these discussion bulletin boards
- λ A reply tab is often just below the post

Privacy on Online forums

- λ Individual Privacy
 - Private messages can be sent to any user on the forum
 - These messages can only be seen by the receiver when he/she logs in through authentication
 - Maintains individual privacy
- λ Group privacy
 - In private forums, only members who have logged in can view the bulletin posts
 - Prohibits public viewing
 - Maintains group privacy

Examples of Online forums

- λ Interests forums
 - <http://www.bmw-sg.com/>
 - <http://teamimpact.editboard.com/>

Is it possible to find relationships online?



Can it be supportive and intimate?

Pros of Online Communities

- λ Helps **foster contact** with diverse others.
- λ **Greater control** over timing and content of self-disclosure.
- λ Communities are **organized by shared interest rather than by shared place.**
- λ More likely to **receive help.**

Fosters contact with diverse others

- λ Lack of social and physical cues.

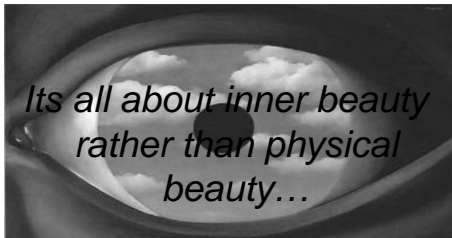
- Similar characteristics?

Example:

"You've got mail" Meg Ryan's character and Tom Hank's character though were "online lovers", they hated each other in real life.



In other words...



Greater Control



- λ Timing of response is up to the individual
- λ Disclosure of self can be withheld till level desired.

Example:

Person A may be able to avoid a response to Person B without having to feel awkward. He/She could just log off and resume communication at a desired time.

Organized by shared interest rather than shared place

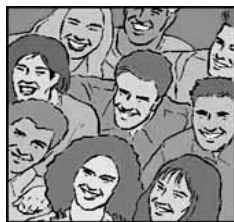
- λ No distance constraints
- λ Networks now include others who share similar interest to theirs.
- λ 4 areas of interest. Political, Technical, Social and Recreational.
- λ Some forums which we use: DeviantART and Clubsnap.

Organized by shared interest rather than shared place

- λ Other online communities
 - "rooms" in Instant messaging sites such as IRC.
- λ Users can select which "room" they would like to chat in.
- λ Relationships can be quite narrow, existing mostly for information processing.
- λ Example: After the Oklahoma City bombing in April, 1995, university students created special information sites and electronic bulletins boards which provided list of names of those injured and the hospitals servicing them.

Most likely to receive help

- λ Net members are distinctive in providing
- λ information
- λ support
- λ companionship
- λ sense of belonging



Most likely to receive help

- λ In an online community, although an on-line request is to a group and not to an individual alone, the recipient of the request **believes** that he/she may be **the only one who can** and **will** help.

Most likely to receive help

- λ As we have learnt in previous Com 125 classes. Users online are motivated to help based on several reasons.
- λ Reciprocity and Reputation.
- λ Providing support and information on the Net expresses one's identity, particularly if technical expertise or supportive behavior is perceived as an integral part of one's self-identity.
- λ Helping others can increase self-esteem, respect from others and status attainment. (Constant, Sproull, Kiesler, 1996)

DID YOU KNOW?

That 58% of messages of an online discussion board came from strangers!!!

Cons of Online Communities

- λ Drift from reality
- λ Displacement Hypothesis – when people interact in online communities they reduce the possible time spent interacting face-to-face/doing other things.
- λ Net users tend to trust strangers easily
 - Lack of status and situational cues
- λ Addiction to a virtual life?

Stay Alert!



- λ <http://2smrt4u.com>

Stay alert!

- λ What can you do to protect yourself
 - Never download unknown profile
 - Choose user and password carefully
- λ Social networking: What parents need to know
 - "Cyber lingo"
 - Supervision of child's online interactions.
 - Control who views your profile

The End!