

Managing Online Communities

Online communities bring together people to talk, work and play. From reddit, to networks linking young mothers, sites for those fighting cancer, building software or even discussing a company's latest product online communities abound. How do these communities work? What brings people in and keeps them contributing? What does a "community manager" or "moderator" do, anyway? How might we know when a community is in trouble? Taking this course will teach you how to build and sustain communities and how to measure activity to see dynamics over their lifecycle. We'll draw on and use many theories from social psychology and human-computer interaction while learning practical and hands-on skills for understanding and building thriving online communities.

Class Logistics

We meet Monday nights 6-9pm in UTA 1.212.

Note that our first meeting is not until **September 9**, since September 2nd is Labor Day.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this course, a student should be able to:

- Describe an online community using frameworks derived from theory
- Describe and understand the occupation of online community manager
- Make principled design choices for supporting online communities
- Measure aspects of online communities to assess their success

Texts

There are two texts for this class:

Kraut and Resnick (2012) Building Successful Online Communities: Evidence-Based Social Design <http://www.amazon.com/Building-Successful-Online-Communities-Evidence-Based/dp/0262016575/>

Millington (2012) Buzzing Communities: How To Build Bigger, Better, And More Active Online Communities <http://www.feverbee.com/2012/11/buzzing-communities-.html>

Assignments

Best and Worst online communities experience

We have all participated in online communities, even if it is just something as simple as asking or answering an online question or reading forums. In this assignment you will write about your best and worst experiences in online communities, or at least experiences that you feel went very well and ones that didn't go well at all (these don't have to be your very best or very worst). It would be best if these came from communities that you had some long-term involvement in, but if you don't have any that you've been long-term members of, then anything in which you've interested with others online is fine.

We will discuss these experiences in class, so please use your best judgement about what to write about and share. As we're discovering in the class and readings, experiences in online communities can be emotionally intense; you may write about intense experiences but don't feel that you have to share these; only if you would like to. Similarly please don't write about conduct that you would not be comfortable sharing with the class.

You can either write two separate papers of 700-900 words each, one for a positive experience, one for a negative experience, or a combined paper that compares and contrasts these (in this case 1400-1800 words). Please use 12 pt font, otherwise you can choose your own formatting.

In the paper you should describe enough of the community, its infrastructure and its culture to help the reader understand your experience and why it was positive or negative. You should write a little about what came before and after these experiences; for example: was that the last time you participated in the community? Did your positive experience lead you to be a regular participant?

Community Analysis

You will prepare an analysis of an online community totaling about 6 pages (plus screenshots). You will identify the type of community and describe how it attracts participants and builds commitment among them. You will identify the aspects of the site that lend themselves to community. You will describe two typical genres of interaction on the site and show an example of each (e.g., an answered question, a shared real-life event, a flame war).

Finally, you will make and justify two suggestions for the site: one focused on design/interface and the other suggesting a community-enhancing activity that a community manager could undertake.

Jive Project

The major assignment of the class is to understand and analyze an organization's online community strategy. Jive Software provides a major platform for online communities, both internal and external (and bridging across both). In small teams (2-3 people) you will be introduced to community managers at local companies using Jive (e.g., Dell, Homeaway, Solarwinds) and interview them on their online community strategy. You will prepare a draft report, obtain feedback from me and your interviewees, then prepare a final report to be shared with the organization and presented in the last class session. This will be a lot of work, but will be very worthwhile for everyone: Jive is growing rapidly and both they and their clients will be looking for interns.

Jive Project – Draft

Your group will submit a draft of the Jive Report. See the Jive Report Assignment for full details of its content. As a draft your submission may have incomplete sections, but should convey the state of your work to date (and outline sections or elements to be completed).

This draft is primarily to ensure that you are on the right track and serves to ground a discussion with the Instructor that will result in a plan for completing your final report and designing your presentation.

Jive Project – Final

As part of the UT Austin iSchool's course on Online Communities, students will conduct short research projects in firms using or considering the Jive collaboration platform.

The learning objectives are:

- To understand how firms use social/communities systems,
- To gain experience interacting with online community managers, and
- To describe and understand an ROI/continuous improvement perspective on online communities and platform investments.

Your group will be introduced to an organization that is using or considering the Jive platform by the instructor and a Jive representative. Your point of contact at the firm will help you plan your research by introducing you to their organization and making further introductions. You will interact with the contacts at the organization on the class Jive installation (training will be provided during the semester).

The research objective for the project is to understand your organization's perspectives on three questions:

What is your organization seeking to accomplish through their online communities? (e.g., coordinate customer service, promote product/lifestyle, identify innovation opportunities through community involvement ...)

What actions have they taken towards accomplishing these goals? (e.g., seeded discussion with personnel, creation of internal/external incentives for desired activity, leading by example...)

What metrics do they employ to understand their progress towards these goals? (e.g., issue turnaround time, customer satisfaction, external participant numbers and activity, lurker-to-leader conversion, speed/quality of question answering)

To gain this information, you will:

- Conduct interviews with relevant personnel at your organization. The number needed and possible will depend on the specific organization, but I anticipate about ~5 interviews each about 30-45 minutes long.
- Review documents. Your organization will share documents about their intentions and metrics for your review. This may include access to dashboards etc.
- Analyze Interaction examples. Your organization will prepare and share a few examples of the sorts of interactions they are seeking to encourage; you will be able to present these in your report and will add value by relating them to the theoretical frameworks presented in the course.

The groups will be no more than 3 members (2 is fine, provided we have sufficient organizations). Students may self-select into groups (using the feature in Canvas). Students will work in groups of 2 or 3, beginning around the half-way point of the class. They will have a strong understanding of different kinds of online communities. Preparation for the Jive project

will begin about half-way through the course, after the community analysis assignment. We will cover interviewing and analysis in class, and group members will interview each other for practice.

The final report will be between 10-15 pages and include screenshots and, where appropriate, analysis based on your firm's data (e.g., curves of posts/participation over time). Your organization may request that you anonymize your report, using pseudonyms, rather than using the real name of your organization or its employees.

Intellectual Property note: In exchange for their participation and giving access to the class, your organization may request that they be able to use the report for their internal or public use or that you refrain from distributing your report outside class. If they wish to use your report, you would not be compensated (beyond the valuable experience of visiting and engaging with your organization and being able to mention the report on your resume). A student's work is their own intellectual property, so while organizations can set conditions for access, I cannot require you to agree as a requirement of the course. So if you are uncomfortable with those requirements, see me and if we cannot resolve the concern I will assign an alternative assignment.

Jive Project – Final Presentation

Your group will develop and present a short presentation that communicates the highlights of your Jive report. These will be presented in class. You may choose to prepare your report as a video with screencast elements, or you may present it 'live' using powerpoint or other visual aids.

The presentation must be between 8 and 10 minutes. You cannot run long; I will cut your group off at 10 minutes by standing up, interrupting and asking you to sit down. This means you must rehearse your presentation and know your timing. To account for inevitable lengthening during a real presentation, I encourage you to ensure that your rehearsed presentation comes out at no longer than 9 minutes.

We are working to bring representatives from the organizations to attend the presentations and help to give feedback, but this might not be possible.

You should treat this presentation as a formal presentation, as you might give to an organization's managing board. This means you should dress professionally and own the stage during your presentation. You should not have long pauses or restarts, nor side chatter. You may hand off sections between group members, but this should be done smoothly and be rehearsed. If you need to access resources online, preparing a presentation that you can click (or making screencasts) is a very good idea, because typing while presenting is very hard to do smoothly.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism or other academic dishonesty will, of course, not be tolerated in this course. I will follow university reporting procedures if I detect plagiarism. You are **required** to review these resources:

"Brief Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism" [PDF](#)

Definitions and University procedures [Link](#)

Tutorial on Academic Honesty [Link](#)

Schedule

Date	Topic, Readings, Assignments
02-Sep	Labor Day - No Class
09-Sep	<p>Introduction Class</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kraut and Resnick, Chapter 1 (Introduction) 2. Millington, Chapter 11 (Competition: Existing Communities)
16-Sep	<p>Offline and Online Communities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community Roundtable http://www.communityroundtable.com/community-101/ 2. Olson, G. M., & Olson, J. S. (2000). Distance matters. <i>Human-Computer Interaction</i>, 15(2), 139–179. doi:10.1207/S15327051HCI1523_4 p139-olson.pdf 3. Hollan, J., & Stornetta, S. (1992). Beyond being there. In Proceedings of ACM SIGCHI. p119-hollan.pdf 4. Resnick, P. (2001). Beyond Bowling Together: SocioTechnical Capital. In J. Carroll (Ed.), <i>HCI in the New Millennium</i>: Addison-Wesley. ResnickSTK.pdf <p>Best and Worst Online Community experience essay due</p>
23-Sep	<p>Motivation and contribution</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kraut and Resnick Chp 2 (Encouraging Contribution) 2. Sullivan, B. L., Wood, C. L., Iliff, M. J., Bonney, R. E., Fink, D., & Kelling, S. (2009). eBird: A citizen-based bird observation network in the biological sciences. <i>Biological Conservation</i>, 142(10), 2292. Sullivan-eBird.pdf 3. Jive Training videos (10 short screencasts, total time < 1 hour). <p>Tech Review: Jive. (Ryan from Jive guest speaking).</p>
30-Sep	<p>Communities of Interest</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kittur, A., & Kraut, R. E. (2008). Harnessing the Wisdom of Crowds in Wikipedia: Quality Through Coordination. In <i>Proceedings of the ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW 2008)</i> (pp. 37–46). San Diego, CA. doi:10.1145/1460563. 1460572 2. Steinkuehler, C. A. and D. Williams (2006). Where Everybody Knows Your (Screen) Name: Online Games as ‘Third Places’ <i>Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication</i> 11(4): 885-909. 3. History of Wikis (on Wikipedia, where else?) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_wikis 4. Yates, D., Wagner, C., & Majchrzak, A. (2010). Factors Affecting Shapers of Organizational Wikis. <i>Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology</i>, 61(3): 543-554. <p>Guest Speaker: Kelly from Yelp</p>
07-Oct	<p>Regulating Behavior / Moderation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kraut and Resnick, Chp 4 (Regulating Behavior)2. Millington Chapter 4. 3. A

	<p>Rape in Cyberspace http://www.juliandibbell.com/articles/a-rape-in-cyberspace/4. Lampe, C., & Resnick, P. (2004). Slash(dot) and Burn: Distributed Moderation in a Large Online Conversation Space. Presented at ACM Human Computer Interaction Conference. p543-lampe.pdf</p> <p>Guest Lecture: Julia - Jerks in Cyberspace Guest Speaker: David from Thunderhead</p>
14-Oct	<p>Communities of Practice</p> <p>1. Howison, J., & Crowston, K. (in press). Collaboration through open superposition. <i>MIS Quarterly</i>, forthcoming. 2. O'Mahony, S., & Lakhani, K. (2011). Organizations in the Shadow of Communities. Research. Retrieved from http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1873989 3. Kankanhalli, A., Tan, B. C. Y., & Wei, K. (2005). Contributing Knowledge to Electronic Knowledge Repositories: An Empirical Investigation. <i>MIS Quarterly</i>, 29(1), 143.</p> <p>Community Analysis due</p> <p>Guest Speaker: Travis Bailey, Comm. Mgr. at Dell</p>
21-Oct	<p>Socialization/Newcomers</p> <p>1. Kraut and Resnick, Chpt 5. 2. Millington Chapter 2, 5 and 6. 3. "Define Gender Gap? Look Up Wikipedia's Contributor List", Noam Cohen (2012): <i>New York Times</i>: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/31/business/media/31link.html</p> <p>Tech Review: Wikis</p>
28-Oct	<p>Community Metrics</p> <p>1. Millington, Chpt 7 and 8. 2. Teaching Students to Study Online Communities Ethically by Amy Bruckman. <i>Journal of Information Ethics</i> 15:2, 82-98, fall 2006. 3. AoIR ethics guide http://aoir.org/documents/ethics-guide/</p> <p>Guest Speaker: Deirdre from Jive</p>
04-Nov	<p>Communities of Action</p> <p>1. Clay Shirky's Cognitive Surplus TED talk. http://www.ted.com/talks/clay_shirky_how_cognitive_surplus_will_change_the_world.html 2. TBD</p> <p>Tech Review: Forums</p>
11-Nov	<p>Communities of Circumstance</p> <p>1. Patients like me. TEDx video http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=n3NVG-pVDIs#! 2. Frost, J. H., & Massagli, M. P. (2008). Social Uses of Personal Health Information Within PatientsLikeMe, an Online Patient Community: What Can Happen When Patients Have Access to One Another's Data. <i>Journal of Medical Internet Research</i>, 10(3). doi:10.2196/jmir.1053 Available Online 3. Zhang, Y., He, D., & Sang, Y. (2013). Facebook as a Platform for Health Information and Communication: A Case Study of a Diabetes Group. <i>Journal of</i></p>

	<i>Medical Systems</i> , 37(3), 1–12. doi:10.1007/s10916-013-9942-7 Zhang-Facebook.pdf
	Tech Review: Sharepoint
18-Nov	Jive report workshop
	Tech Review: Wordpress
25-Nov	Reserved class day
	Jive Report - Draft due
02-Dec	Jive Report Presentations
	Jive Report - Final due