

Exploring Online Communities: Exemplars and Criteria

EDTC 816 Advanced Methods for Building Online Communities

New Jersey City University

Sunday, January 22, 2017

Dwayne D. Davis

What Are Online Communities

Our world is composed of millions of people with varying beliefs, traditions, culture, and customs. Due in part to geographical factors and historical events, these unique aspects of people around the world differ amongst regions and countries. With advances in technology, in particular the Internet, the ability for people to feasibly interact and communicate with each other from opposite ends of the globe have reduced insolation of unique social factors that were once specific to geographically dispersed people. Technology has played an important role in creating a more globally connected world. The shift to a globally connected world is best known as globalization. A strong argument can be made that the most impactful result of globalization is the sharing of information amongst people in different countries.

As our world continues to become more globally connected, communities continue to share practices and information to improve the world in which people interact and live. A community is commonly considered a space with people that share common aspects such as beliefs, purposes, cultures, and customs. Geographical factors, social movements, and new technologies are among the catalysts that form communities. In particular, online communities are spaces on the Internet that afford people with common purposes and interests to share information with a broader range of people. Online communities can be found across many industries such as, education, automotive, gaming, theatre, athletics, and professional industries. Online communities can be created by multi-international companies to bring geographically disperse employees together. Conversely, an individual can create an online community for new parents or food enthusiasts through a blog.

There are countless online communities that exist on the Internet. Online communities range from thousands of users to millions of users across the world. Popular online communities include: Classmates, which focuses on school, college, work, and living; Facebook, which focuses on general photos, video, and social media applications to connect friends; Reddit, which provides users with a platform to post news, links, and other media; and SoundCloud, which

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provides a digital repository for users to share their music with a broader community. There are many examples of online communities. Two exemplars that will be discussed are LinkedIn.com and Reddit.com.

LinkedIn.com

[LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com) (LinkedIn) is a professional online network that provides business professionals in various industries with digital tools and spaces to communicate with other professionals across the globe. LinkedIn.com describes its online community as the largest professional network. LinkedIn was launched on May 5 2013. In one month, LinkedIn had 4,500 users in its network. Currently, LinkedIn is available in over 200 countries, operates in 24 different languages, and has over 467 million users. Users of LinkedIn have the ability to create a professional profile that highlights professional accomplishments, qualifications, interests, and goals. LinkedIn allows its users to develop a digital Rolodex of people and businesses that creates a multiplier effect of new connections with people via common professional connections.

When observing LinkedIn's online community a number of features are evident. First, LinkedIn provides a clean and organized website for its users and potential users. LinkedIn allows users to connect to its community through the creation of a LinkedIn account or through an existing Facebook account. The option to connect to LinkedIn's site via Facebook allows users to benefit from a seamless setup process. Additionally, connection via Facebook, allows LinkedIn to use the power of Facebook's social media data to create a more dynamic online community for its users. Once a user is registered with LinkedIn, she or he is taken through a number of steps to complete a digital resume in the form of a profile. Users are asked to connect additional social media accounts, select industries of interest, and connect with other users. In addition, new users have the ability to quickly follow other businesses and create groups that other users can join to create micro online communities with targeted interests within the larger LinkedIn online community. Active users are provided with notification of news, job opportunities, possible connections and other information that ensure constant activity and flow of information

throughout the online community.

Reddit.com

[Reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com) (Reddit) is a free online subscription-based community with the goal to connect individual with ideas, digital trends, and recent news. The website allows its users to post links of media such as news articles, videos, and pictures. In addition, Reddit affords it users online spaces to create their own blogs to share information on personal interests with others who share similar interests. Reddit's mission is to help people discover a place where they can be their true selves and empower its community to flourish. According to the site's community page, Reddit launched its first new story in 2007. To date, Reddit is among the most used online community with more than twenty million users.

A key feature of Reddit includes the ability for users to create an online community on virtually any topic of interest. In addition, Reddit uses a voting system that either promotes or demotes media that its users post based on users votes. Media that receive the highest votes are considered "up-voted" and are promoted to the sites top stories page. Users can comment on any media posted on Reddit's site. Reddit considers the comment users post as the most important aspect of its sight because the comments drive vigorous discussions, context, and humor within the online community. Reddit also provides a wiki space to provide users with a space to collaborate and shared knowledge. On the wiki-page, users can create a discussion or view previous discussions. The site displays many different categories of content, including, world news, gaming, and pictures. In addition, users have the option to subscribe to various categories of media that interest them and receive notifications. Overall, Reddit's online community gives its users the ability to post and comment on anything of interest.

Similarities and Criteria

After analyzing LinkedIn and Reddit, there are shared attributes to both sites that constitute an online community and set the criteria for which an online community should meet to be viable within the online community ecosystem. First, LinkedIn and Reddit, focuses on aspects

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that bring its users together. LinkedIn focuses on attracting and offering tools for professional services, while Reddit focuses on providing a space for sharing information that interest like-minded individuals. Second, both sites allow its users to customize their profile and ultimately the information that they receive. LinkedIn allows its users to customize their profile in the form of a digital resume, digital professional catalog, and subscriptions to news feeds specific to the users. Reddit allows its users to select categories of news and media that are of interest to them to create and experience of belonging. Third, and likely most importantly, both sites allow its users to create, share, and comment on media created within the community. This ability for users to create content promotes organic development of information that bring users within the online community back to the sites and closer together. Users generated information creates value within both sites. Lastly, Both LinkedIn and Reddit interface with the popular social media sites like Facebook. Through this interface, both sites benefit from endless social media data generated over the years by Facebook. This interface with Facebook, and other social networks of the like, ultimately expands the use of LinkedIn and Reddit's online community because the interface attracts new users via connection on external social media sites.

Conclusion

As technology advances, the connection between people, beliefs, traditions, culture, and customs are brought closer together to create shared interests and goals. Online communities are byproducts of human curiosity in others and the power of technology to transcend geographical barriers. Online communities provide a space for self-expression, freedom of thought, attainment of goals, collaboration, and sharing of ideas. Online communities are an extension of physical communities of practices. In that, the constant transfer of information between old users and new users creates a life cycle of social, professional, and human development.

Appendix I: Turnitin Similarity Report

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