

18MPS25E-CYBER PSYCHOLOGY

Unit 4

SHARING AND SURFING: THE BENEFITS OF ONLINE COMMUNITIES AND Web BROWSING

Virtual communities the benefits of belonging online

The evolution of the World Wide Web known as the internet, brought about the forming or building of virtual communities to take place. These virtual communities are groupings of netizens (internet citizens) that share common interests, hobbies and likes. They are built through connections from social media networks and other social interactive sites.

ADVANTAGES

- The technology has the power to bring enormous leverage to ordinary people

Through the power of social media the development of these virtual communities had rapidly increased in number and is now able to reach the ordinary people for as long as there's a computer with internet connection since the use of these social media has already been widely adapted worldwide.

- Provides a forum for people to discuss topics of interest

One of the main factors to the rapid development of virtual communities through social media is because of the concept on common topics of interest that people can freely talk about and widely discuss through these virtual communities using social media.

- Allows participation at the convenience of the participant

Since the internet technology has been developed its mobility characteristic has encouraged people to build virtual communities at their own convenience whenever wherever.

- Text based

Text based meaning people are free to express ideas in these virtual communities using the language and medium that they are comfortable in using which is the use of words also known in the virtual community as text.

- Allows participation by many different people from many different places

Since these virtual communities have been mobile all thanks to the internet technology, people can now then get easy access to these communities anywhere they may be in the world.

- Hides race, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, etc

One of the best advantage of virtual communities is its anonymity characteristic, where in you can just filter the personal information that you want to share in this community and choose to share only the information how you want other people to see your image as a member of the virtual community.

- Promotes interaction with others that can lead to physical meetings

Having the internet as the platform for these virtual communities, people which are sociable in nature would long to see other members of their virtual community personally and share deeper interaction with each other.

- Provides a sense of anonymity

Being a community in the virtual world, one wouldn't really know if that information found for that person in that virtual community is genuine information since one can just easily choose to hide information which are sensitive wherein only chosen people would know.

- Some arenas are moderated

Most of these virtual communities are moderated by site administrators so all activities are tracked and monitored

- Not a broadcast medium

These virtual communities though they are publicly visible but the activities happening within these communities are monitored and regulated so the posts within these communities stay within the community's vicinity

- Media is not "fixed"

The media used for these virtual communities are not fixed which make these communities flexible and diverse

- No built in opinion restraints

Anyone can freely do whatever he/she wants within these communities as long as it follows the regulations specific to each community.

Social networks, in the most general sense, are ways to model connections between people. People, or actors, in the network are considered nodes (circles), and the connections between them, or edges (lines), represent ties that result from interaction or relationships. These networks may form from any social behavior, such as online communication, in-person communication, and even more abstract forms of connection, such as knowing of a person due to them being your relative.

Social networks are powerful tools that are used in both social sciences such as sociology and psychology, as well as in quantitative fields such as statistics and mathematics. Examining the structure of the network in general, such as density and the number of components, as well as examining individual nodes' contributions to the network through metrics such as centrality, can provide a lot of insight into complex social phenomena.

The benefits of weak ties and virtual communities

What is a weak tie?

Now that we understand what a graph is, we can look into the types of connections in a graph. These can be grouped into *absent ties*, *weak ties*, and *strong ties*.

Absent ties, are, as the name suggests, connections that do not exist in a graph. So if Person A and Person B are not connected in a graph, the edge $A - B$ is an absent tie.

Strong ties are at the other end of the spectrum. These are ties between people that are very interconnected with each other. In real-world terms, this could include your close family and friends whom you interact with on a daily basis. You probably have a lot in common with these people, and you most likely have many connections in common with them. Your strong connections most likely resemble a **dense graph**, seen below. Finally, your **weak ties** are in between absent and strong ties. These are ties between people that know each other, but not particularly well. In real-world terms, these are the people that you interact with once a month, whom you probably do not see very often. You may not have much in common with your

weak ties, and most of your weak ties will not know each other. Therefore, the graph of your weak ties most likely resembles a **sparse graph**, seen below.

The benefits of weak ties

Now that you know about the different kinds of connections, it may seem counter-intuitive to say that weak ties are the most important. After all, wouldn't the people who you have the strongest connection with be the most willing to help you?

Real-world graphs

In order to understand the power of weak ties, we must look at the structure (network topology) of real-world social graphs. Below is one example of such a real-world network, representing a US college football network.

Immediately, we notice that such a real-world network consists of groups of densely connected people, or communities. These communities are then connected to each other through a relatively small number of edges. We can think of the edges within each community as being strong ties. These people are likely on the same team, and are very close with each other. The edges that connect each distinct community can then be thought of as weak ties. These are most likely weaker connections, as players are less likely to have frequent interactions with people in other teams.

Small-world networks

A common method of modeling such a network is by framing it as a [small-world network](#). Small-world networks have a few defining characteristics that give them the above appearance:

- Most nodes are *not* neighbors of each other
- Neighbors of a *particular* node are likely to be neighbors of each other
- Nodes are reachable from each other through a small number of edges
- These characteristics lead to the formation of densely connected communities connected by a small number of edges. Such networks naturally arise in the modeling of many real-world complex systems, such as the neurons in our brain, and social networks.

A virtual community is a social network of individual who connect through specific social media, potentially crossing geographical and political boundaries in order to pursue mutual interests and goals. Some of the pervasive virtual communities are online communities operating under social network services.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ONLINE

- Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2003) found that lonely college student were more likely to report internet use for emotional support than were non lonely students.
- Pathological users used the internet to meet new people, for emotional support, to play interactive games, and were more socially disinhibited.
- Internet self help group members participate in a form of emotional support in which the interpersonal dynamics are different from traditional support network.

- Volunteers or therapist used the computer conference to offer each other emotional support and practical information.

THE INTERNET AND QUALITY OF LIFE

The internet has changed business, education, government, health care and even the ways in which we interact with our loved ones – it has become one of the key drivers of social evolution. The changes in social communication are of particular significance. The internet has removed all communication barriers.

Benefits of internet

- Made communication easier
- Updated with events
- Made advertising easier
- Can easily locate lost items (GPS)
- Made learning easier
- You can access the latest news from any part of the of the world without depending on the television or news paper.
- Professional can now exchange information and materials online thus enhancing research.

Negative impact on life

- No escape from work
- Lack of sleep
- Can leads to low self esteem
- Availability of illegal or inappropriate material online that isn't age suitable.

- Addiction to social network can disrupt an individual life both personally and professionally.

Yet others have been known to misuse the internet for spreading hate and terrorism, two dangerous catastrophic scenarios

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