The role of communities embracing and adapting to the Web 2.0 through
Facebook

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Abstract

This paper investigates the adaptation of communities to the Web 2.0, and how it has become a major characteristic to the construction of online relationships, involving the social media site Facebook. Virtual communities are explored and linked to the current digital era and how social virtual communities are using the Facebook platform in everyday life to publish content, taking part in user connection through their activity. Beverungen, Böhm, and Land (2015, p. 479) believes that user connection focuses on the 'audience', now 'users', as online communities who publish content to Facebook for users to read and use. This content may be productive or unproductive, however, Facebook is one of the leading reasons for social relationships and virtual communities and the shift from physical to virtual. Virtual communities now have the ability to connect to users they may not know personally, resulting in new relationships and interlinked personal communities (Gruzd, Wellman & Takhteyev, 2011, p. 1). This paper analyses how online user activity on Facebook has been a factor that assisted the evolution and adaptation of offline communities to online communities.

Keywords: *Facebook, communities, representations, connection, interaction, users, adaptation*

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Since the release of the social networking site Facebook, users have been given the opportunity to generate and publish their own content to their profiles 'free-of-charge'. This impressive site has now reached an incredibly high number of users, attaining 2.2 billion active users by 2017, with numbers still rising (Constine, 2017). Facebook is not the only form of interaction for virtual communities, with popular discussion websites such as Reddit (2005) and other Internet forums also forming virtual communities where users can interact.

These sites have become the most popular way to communicate in the twenty-first century, providing various options including blog-type techniques, photos and videos. Not only do they allow users to publish content but they also provide them with websites where they can listen to music, read news and play. It has become a procedure for people to sustain connections to others, communicate themselves and construct new relationships. Similar to physical communities, this shift has allowed people to also become part of virtual communities, motivating users to the adaptation of communities on the Web 2.0. With the growing development of Facebook, it has significantly impacted lives by becoming a daily activity for entertainment and cultural purposes (Jin, 2015). The site has become an environment for self-expression and participation amongst various age groups. User activity has become a major factor in the process of communicating online through Facebook, allowing these online communities to share stories, opinions and anything that takes their interest. The social networking site has not only allowed people to communicate with users' friends or family, but has enabled them to engage with other users that they may not know personally. This has not only expanded the number of users to communicate with, but has granted the ability to form online communities with people from all over the world. User connection is the transfer from physical connection and interaction into the online world of the Web 2.0, connecting a set of people and creating a sense of community (Gruzd et al., 2011). The adaptation of groups within the social networking site Facebook has formed a sense of community in this digital era, through users participating in online discussions and debates.

The Welcoming of User Connection

User connection is similar to the traditional meaning of connecting and creating a community – A set of people with strong interaction and connection, creating a sense of unity (Gruzd et al., 2011). Communication on Facebook can be compared to being similar to offline interaction, as information is posted and stored on personal profiles, including relationships statuses, hobbies and even debatable topics which can all be discussed in offline communities. Facebook has

assisted in the creation of communities that produce their own content. User activity was created as a defining process for users who create and publish their own work online, attracting other users to read and connect with the publisher or other readers. Not only does online activity give users' a purpose for interaction, it also serves others with new social connections and assisting with maintaining existing relationships (Gruzd et al., 2011). With the transition from audiences to online users, there has become a mass broadcast of information to social networking sites such as Facebook (Thompson, 2008).

User connection focuses on connecting and responding to others, as well as keeping up to date with new information or news that can create conversation between users or communities, similar to that of a friend group. This is the reasoning behind the concepts 'following' and 'adding'. This concept focuses on the users or information that is chosen to be accessed by the account holder, placed onto a 'News Feed' on social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Zuckerberg stated that a 'news feed' is "a stream of everything that's going on in their lives." referring to content that is being posted in an up-to-date timeline (Thompson, 2008). This feature on Facebook enables user connection to occur, with people responding or commenting on posts that they feel are relatable. This engagement is a state of mind of users that are committed, passionate and dedicated to connecting online within virtual communities about various topics and situations (Porter, 2015). Emotions of users stimulate actions, which initiate participation in the community, such as the comment section on published content that allow users to debate and discuss specific topics relating to news, games, videos etc. This connection via different hobbies and interests on Facebook groups and pages has constructed a sense of community through virtual interaction.

Sense of Community in the Digital Era

The Web 2.0 relies on online users to generate the content, creating an approach that can define the labour that is associated with the formation of Web 2.0 content (Jin, 2015). The creation of collaborative content is one of the main

aspects of the Web 2.0, including multiple media posts on Facebook and the interaction between others online that it may initiate. Facebook has enabled users to connect and converse through text, photos and videos on their profiles, providing engagement and motivating interaction with other users within the community. The Internet has opened this new economic form where user-generated content has become part of the primary attributes. Facebook has assisted in the movement of communication from purely offline to online at any time of the day. Not only has it permitted users to create an online version of their identity, users' can create pages and groups through their accounts depending on their interests. Any user is able to request to be part of the group of be invited, creating communities with various people from around the world. Multiple social media identities are quite common, however, Facebook makes it difficult to make multiple profiles as different email addresses and information are needed to create a new account. Instagram and Tumblr allow users to create numerous accounts, even by using the same log in details. These social media sites embrace the use of multiple accounts, with Instagram allowing a user to have up to 5 pages (Instagram, 2018). Social networking sites give users the ability to follow specific accounts on a certain account and make posts that are separate to their other profiles. Social media users can be a part of multiple communities depending on the account that they are logged in to, and can communicate from multiple profiles. Facebook has limited this access as a user can be added to multiple groups and pages at one time.

For example, users may take interest in other communities focusing on cooking, exercise, fashion or even religious communities, interacting with others who have similar interests. This sense of place drives the audience to feel as if they belong to a community, also giving them a reason to generate their online identity. Social communities are a location for users' to receive support or socialize with others through user activity, resulting in communication, similar to what people would do in offline situations. These virtual communities perform in sensible arrangements for society, as they support amalgamation and belonging. New societal communities are developed as a united establishment that influences the value of responsibility and oversteps the power of politics

and wealth, functioning as groups that have the power to influence. Users that are taking part in this influential establishment have various character and disposition, representing themselves through various personal interests within communities.

Representations of the Internet User

Internet users that are involved in virtual communities are typically portrayed in ways that reflect their personal interests and the communities they are part of. It is common for users to represent a certain style of virtual identity, usually labeled within various categories. Users have embraced the opportunity that Facebook has given them, granting them the possibility to meet their individual goals of sharing their personal disclosures in a public forum (Aguiton & Cardon, 2007). A users status and influence can define a virtual community, as activity and influential entities inspire other community members (Porter, 2015). Internet users can represent themselves in different forms through social media networks, using this form of identity to attract other users through their posts and discussions online.

Facebook has enabled users to interact with others, although, this may only be a one-way action. Users are able to follow profiles, but this does not necessarily mean the account has to follow back (Gruzd et al., 2011). Due to this process, users behind public or personal pages have been able to form communities with millions of users who may follow their page just for their content without following back. These page creators or celebrities have the capability to communicate with millions of users online, and has assisted with the creation of smaller communities within the page that may result in a perception of a real community. There are a few different types of virtual community members, as users have a different approach to online engagement and the limits of their public discussions. One user may take the personal interest approach, using Facebook to search for information, buy and sell goods and promote their capabilities to gain a certain status and maximization of recognition (Aguiton & Cardon, 2007). Another type of user focuses on their belonging within the virtual

community, stimulated by distributing knowledge, collective concern and volunteering, ensuring they take part in mutual activities (Aguiton & Cardon, 2007). As there is an array of different virtual communities, there are many representations of users on social media platforms such as Facebook. Virtual community members find value in communities that seek to construct relationships through interaction and helping others, and the gratification that results from these notions. Some members also join virtual communities for the enjoyment of control in participation, having access to data, and having a sense of belonging and bond to a community (Porter, 2015). Depending on how active, significant and consistent a user is their aims can be seen as adjustable and defined by their involvement. Self-identity of members is also another factor within virtual communities, as users aim to attain a responsive and comprehensive connection to please their experience within a Facebook community (Porter, 2015). This self-awareness has transferred from physical communities to the Web 2.0, allowing users to adapt to their portrayal of themselves online.

Communities adapting to Web 2.0

Social communities are persistently changing, integrating and redefining groups that have transferred from physical communities. Cultural marginalizations and controlled progress have shifted from physical to digital communities, placing this change in a notable point in cultural conventions. Facebook contains social attributes that create expression by users through personal content, forming communities on in the virtual world. As Facebook now has millions of active users, it is difficult to determine limits and features of the social service and the spread of information through multiple communities that have formed within the network. Facebook is a clear guide to the relational virtual domain on the Web 2.0 that has been adapted by physical communities in their own environments. This digital exchange through virtual communities from 'face-to-face' interaction has become a voluntary progress and coordinative collaboration.

Social media platforms were the beginning of the transformation of communities, giving people a network where they can connect and engage with friends or family without having to speak to them in person. Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard University student, created Facebook in 2004 to connect to his friends on campus (Thompson, 2008). The network has now become one of the biggest social media platforms for users to interact with one another, and create groups and communities through connection and collaboration. Facebook has integrated peoples businesses, hobbies and interests through its many features, providing users with various options to communicate and socialize. It has given business owners the opportunity to use this platform as a way to maintain and create relationships, as well as allow workers and companies to promote their brand and preserve an online existence (Beverungen et al., 2015). Thompson (2008) used an example of a student who created a group, which declared her love for Coldplay and her wish to participate in Greenpeace, sparking many other users to join the group with her. This group provided a sense of community within the users who had joined, granting them with an environment that takes their interest. These users may not know each other outside of the social media network, but it compares to a physical community discussing these interests in a real environment. Communities have begun adapting to the Web 2.0 and the features it provides in order to build a sense of community online.

Conclusions and Future Study

With the growing confirmation of interaction on social media sites, communities have been able to expand and adapt to the virtual world on the Web 2.0. The shift has assisted in the construction of online relationships, resulting in virtual communities and their significance to online communication. Research into the success rates of virtual communities must take place in order to study how different Internet users are finding their virtual communities and how they compare to the physical.

Facebook has provided features to assist in the growth of virtual communities and users connecting through their strong interaction, creating a sense of unity

within these groups of people. As virtual identities can represent multiple versions of a person, it has permitted people to engage with specific groups and pages that take their interest, comparable to the way physical communities interact. These social media websites have opened a virtual society where user-generated content has become a major attribute to social relationships through the Web 2.0. Communities have adapted to online engagement as features online have made the process effortless to find information that captures users and inspires them to take part in user connection.

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