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**Research Summaries**

**Background Research Summary**

The central focal point of the group is to gain an understanding of nature and structure of communities, as well as the methods of discovering, joining and integration. Furthermore, Research into these topics based on literature reviews and industry reports to help clarify problems and potential difficulties.

From background research, it can be established that the use of internet based communications for social interactions has been on the rise throughout the Web 2.0 era. Amongst the rise of online interactions has come a variety of methods to join and form social bonds and communities, be it through more intimate services such as dating sites, entrepreneurial pursuits such as crowd funding, an educational approach, or simply for entertainment. With the advent of Web 2.0, a wide plethora of different environments for a variety of specialized social and communal needs has been increasing, and with the greater availability of these communities has resulted in changing social expectations and experiences from the greater exposure that the internet brings.

With the ability to potentially find a community that may suit one's needs easily, the importance of an easy to use and understand interface becomes a prevalent factor in deciding effectiveness. Furthermore, the growth and retention of a community can be aided through the use of visual cues and communal culture and attitude. Through the utilization of visual design elements, an increase in the desirability for subscription to a community can be improved. Furthermore by correctly nurturing the culture within an established community such that the members prioritizes shared benefit, as well as fostering the veteran members of a community to contribute back into the community, it can be shown that the benefits to the health and growth to communities are far greater.

In another research study that was examined by the group, it has been discovered that the method of communication is extremely important. The two typical methods of communication online are either text based, or vocal based messaging. The study found that vocal communications in a virtual environment has many benefits, which include quicker and more effective conveyance of ideas, better teamwork, and a greater degree of interaction with others within the virtual space. This however is contrasted by many detriments such as the loss of anonymity, the requirement for impression management, and a greater chance for a negative social experience. This is further compounded by design difficulties shows that the implementation of communication within a community must be carefully considered before execution.

Through further research, it was discovered that integration into a community has important barriers must be overcome to ensure proper and effective integration. Other than the obvious language barrier, both the community and the potential new member must possess a desire and correct attitude. The understanding of the skill and knowledge level of the new member should ideally be acknowledged by the community. Contribution through participation and observation is an extremely method for integration by allowing new members to garner a better affinity with the community as well as absorb communal culture and learn unspoken rules of the community. This is where the careful consideration of the design for interfaces for access to a community is extremely important.

**User Research Results Summary**

The group focused on the students of UofT for their research. In particular the general consensus of the students on community which includes their feelings on availability and social climate of the university, the effectiveness of visual design to generate interest, opinions of pre-established applications with a community already, opinions on the design of these applications, and methods and effectiveness of community integration. The results of these will be summarized below.

Firstly, our research found that the general student population felt that it was difficult to find a community at UofT. Reasons include difficulty finding a community that interested them, problems with integration, or a personal difficulty with meeting new people. From students who were already in a community, we found that there was a perceived benefit to them such as improved work ethic, and an overall improvement to their quality of life. From students that had not entered a community, it was found that a small percentage of students had poor experience with locating fellow students or communities. Finally the general trend of focus given when seeking a community was that shared academic interests and shared interest in similar events were the most popular. This gives further weight to our theory that finding communities is a legitimate problem at UofT.

When examining the effectiveness of a visual interfaces, we found that good visual design is a major contributing factor to allow for the effective interest and usage for an application. Easy navigation, a clean and modern appearance, and methods of identifying communities of interest prove vital to effective design. When examining a pre-established application used to manage a virtual community in a learning environment, we found that in the general consensus was that this community was considered beneficial in a limited capacity. Most interesting was that it was found that the application was not effectively used, with many students choosing to withhold asking questions and looking for solutions within this community altogether. This can be attributed to poor design, as the results show that many users feel that methods of search and overall design of the application was archaic and of little use. The problem of limited usage also stems from trust issues, as often solutions and answers they may receive comes from other students with questionable accuracy.

Finally our group also examined the integration techniques and methods of an established community within UofT. The club in question hosted an orientation event aimed at new members to the community and employed a variety of activities focused on welcoming and integrating the new members effectively. It was found that the community employed methods such as allowing new members a facet in which to interact with the established community, and activities that focused on cooperation with fellow members of the community. These methods proved to be extremely successful as they allow for the display of skill and knowledge, as well as fostering connections between members to ensure new members feel welcome and have an overall positive experience linked to the community which helped expedite the integration process greatly.

**Experience Map**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Stages** | Entice | Enter | Engage | Exit | Extend |
| People | - Students of UofT | - Students of UofT | - Students of UofT | - Students of UofT | - Students of UofT |
| Contexts | - Looking for a community to join  -Looking for new friends with similar interests  - Looking solutions to problems | - At home online  - On campus in person or online  - Anywhere with an internet connection | - On campus  - Online  - At hosted venues | - Successful integration  - Lack or loss of interest  - Unsuccessful integration | - As a member of the community  - As an outsider to the community |
| Feelings | - Curiosity  - Loneliness  - Boredom | - Hesitant  - Curious  - Trepidation  - Excited | - Interest  - Curiosity  - Irritation | - Fulfilment  - Disappointment  - Delighted | - Disgust  - Pride |
| Thinking | - Do I have to?  - Where can I find other people who like similar things to me?  - Who is this community? | - Why is this so complicated?  - Where do I sign up?  - I hope I don't have to invest too much time  - I hope this will help me somehow | - What is this all about?  - Do I fit in?  - Do I have time to keep showing up?  - This takes up a lot of time  - This sucks, it's hard to use and no one is helpful | - I'm glad I joined  - What a waste of time  - I wish I could stay, but I'm too busy  - How can I contribute? | - I wonder if my friends would be interested?  - How can I help my community grow?  - How can I warn others not to join? |
| Actions | - Requirement by Course  - Research Online  - Ask friends for more details | - Sign up to join | - Try to integrate into community  - Passively observe community | - Participation and contribution to the community  - Continued passive observation  - Leaving Community | - Recommend to friends or other students  - Complain to friends or other students  - Send feedback |
| Touch points | - Recommendation by fellow students  - Website | - Through online application  -In person registration | - Orientations or welcome events  - Online in discussion forums  - Online through an application  - Hosted events | - Online  - In person | - Online  - In person |

**Appendix**

**Assignment Attribution**

**Ryan Young**

* + Individual research
  + Creation of experience map
  + Summarization of Group findings and Background research

**Kevin Huang**

* + Individual research
  + Creation of experience map

**Markovchyn Dennis**

* + Individual research
  + Creation of experience map

**Roshan Ravishankar**

* + Individual research
  + Creation of experience map

**Utkarash Agarwal**

* + Individual research
  + Creation of experience map