

Community Design through Social Media

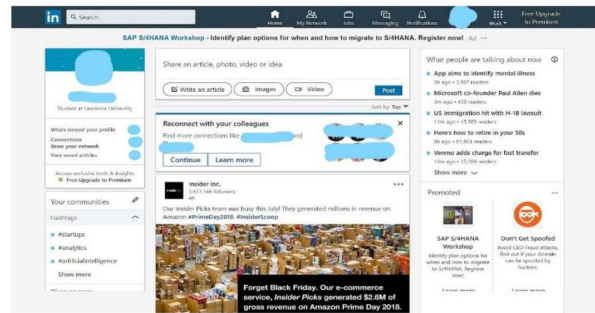
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Among many changes that technology has brought to us, social media has taken part in delivering us information beyond our physical limit. It becomes a tool for individuals to receive and spread information to the wired world. It is significant for us to identify how social media has engaged in the way people interact with each other in order to grasp the magnitude of the effects of technology. Bellah poses two ideas for the form of human interaction: "Community" and "Lifestyle Enclave". In his book, he defines these two terms as follows; "A community attempts to be an inclusive whole, celebrating the interdependence of public and private life and of the different callings of all." (72); and Lifestyle Enclave "is fundamentally segmental and celebrates the narcissism of similarity." (72) He identifies Community as a place where different individuals are welcomed as a part of a group, whereas Lifestyle Enclave is a product of Individualism and each individual chooses to be a part of it for mingling with those who are similar to each other.

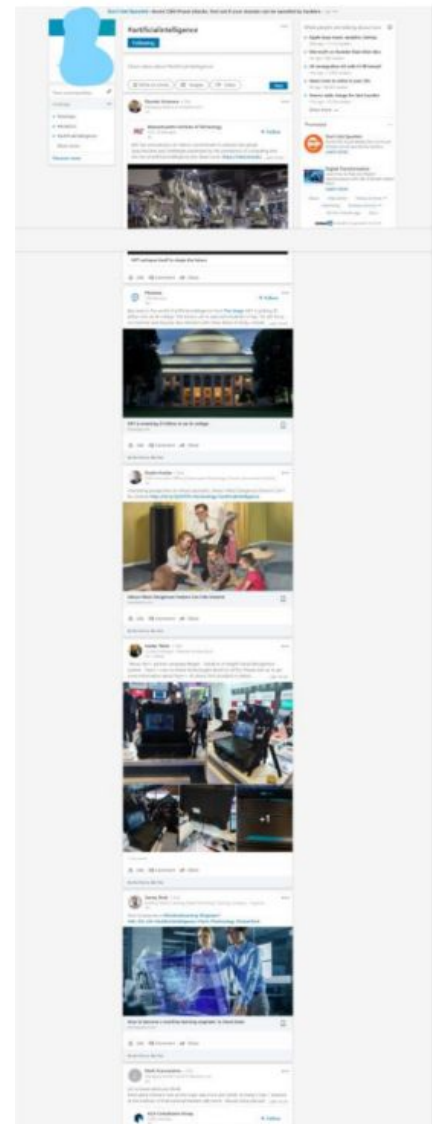
To answer this question of how social media helps us to form either Community or Lifestyle Enclave, I pick one social media platform, LinkedIn, to examine how it fits to the definition of both or either of these two figures. LinkedIn is social media specifically targeted for professionals. Its users include corporate workers and students. Its main functionalities include; show your career paths and accomplishments; posting on a feed; connecting to people; sending and receiving messages; and applying to the jobs listed there. One of LinkedIn's interesting

feature is a hashtag. On the left side of their main page, right next to the feed, you can see the section that says “Your communities” [First Image]. The hashtags you choose to follow show up on this section. When you click one of



these hashtags, you can see posts tagged with that word. These posts are not just from your networks, but also from all over the world. You are going to see every posts tagged with that word. Then, on the top of the feed tagged with that hashtag, they ask you to “Share ideas about this topic” [Second Image]. You can post articles that you write with the tag and share it with everyone who follow it.

There are a couple of points to make for identifying if this function enables LinkedIn to be more Community-like or Lifestyle-Enclave-like. So far, there is no way that you can see the tagged posts only from your network. You see every posts from all over the world under the same hashtag. The hashtag can gather people from different background under the one interest and let them exchange their ideas and opinions. Regardless of your background, this hashtag function can expose you to the ideas of completely strangers and let you interact with them. In such a sense, this function seems to accelerate the formation of



Community on LinkedIn. In fact, they call these hashtags “Your communities”.

However, there are more to consider before we rush to a conclusion. First of all, users need to go through the process of picking the hashtags they want to follow in order to see these random posts about topics. They are asked as individuals whether those hashtags are their interest or not. The whole set of information about the topic from strangers does not come in, unless it matches to their preference. Therefore, individuals need to be proactive to choose somethings they like. Secondly, people who want to follow these topics need to have already signed up to LinkedIn and become its users beforehand. As they state “The mission of LinkedIn is simple: connect the world’s professionals to make them more productive and successful”, we can see that LinkedIn is social media specifically marketed to career-oriented individuals to network each other. People choose to be a part of this LinkedIn community for their professional growth and choose to get more information about the topics they are interested in. In this sense, LinkedIn is a place exclusively for those who are interested in interacting with a group of career-driven people. Each of them gather in LinkedIn for their similarity, interest in career development in this case, which leads LinkedIn to be more of Lifestyle Enclave.

To sum up, the hashtag function may be able to allow the individuals to form Community where they can connect with each other, but not everyone can navigate themselves to that point, especially those who are outside the LinkedIn’s marketing target. LinkedIn shows users contents from other users, which seemingly does not restrict their feel of belonging to the open-ended Community. However, the form as social media for professionals

has already registered as an introduction to Lifestyle Enclave. Overall, it fails to create Community open to everyone.

Works Cited

Bellah, Robert N. Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Community in American Life. *University of California Press*, 2008.