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# Tapestry: An Anonymous Storytelling Platform

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**Abstract**

It is human nature to tell stories, so our platform explores how we can use stories to help facilitate conversations about difficult topics and opposing viewpoints. Our web application, Tapestry, aims to overcome echo chambers and political and ideological distancing by allowing users to address difficult topics through storytelling. We set out to build a platform that would prioritize ideas over individual user identities. Users can both ask and answer questions within topics like politics, education, identity, health, entertainment, and climate. The system is anonymous so users can read and share content without inherently assuming biases based on user profile information. In this paper, we discuss the key features of Tapestry, and will explain how the platform provides an alternative to mainstream social media.

**Author Keywords**

Anonymity; online community; application development; storytelling; identity; diversity.

**CSS Concepts**

• **Human centered computing~Social content sharing**; Networks~Network privacy and anonymity;

**Introduction**

Tapestry aims to overcome echo chambers and political and ideological distancing by allowing users to address difficult topics through storytelling. Discussions around many issues online are often filled with vitriol and do not allow for much back-and-forth between people of differing viewpoints. To combat this phenomenon, we constructed a hypothesis; our hypothesis is that users

## Good Utilization of the Side Bar

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will be less likely to become aggressive if they are only conversing or sharing stories rather than giving short, curt replies. To test this hypothesis, we implemented a web application designed around one question: how might we use stories as a way to help facilitate conversations about difficult topics and opposing viewpoints? We will know if our hypothesis holds if we see reduced instances of aggressive responses over difficult topics compared to mainstream social media sites.

### Background

Before prototyping, we read papers to help inform our design choices. *The Sociology of Storytelling* addresses how narrative form is used to communicate, specifically in the realm of politics. *Political Blend* discusses the concepts of echo chambers with the overall goal of creating an application that combats political echo chambers through meeting people with opposing views. With *Political Blend's* approach as a starting point, we added the *Sociology of Storytelling* on top of those ideas to approach combatting echo chambers with a new approach.

This new approach began with the question of whether the site should be anonymous or not, where we looked to essays on the pros and cons of anonymity. *Why Do People Seek Anonymity on the Internet?* investigates diverse opinions on a desire for anonymity online, looking at the motivation for different individuals to seek out anonymity and the trade-offs of having anonymous systems for users. *Anonymous Quorans are still Quorans, just anonymous* looks at the effect of anonymity on user participation, and specifically, how post length can correspond to a greater sense of social appreciation on anonymous platforms. *Knowledge sharing in virtual communities* studies the ideas around information disclosure through a Self Determination Theory (SDT) lens and establishes connections between the three innate needs outlined in the framework and user sentiments in a virtual space. To tie these findings

together, we pull from the arguments for the use of narrative form to communicate about politics and the arguments for anonymity together to influence the design of our web application that will combat echo chambers.

### System

Tapestry has three main functions at work: user anonymity, character minimums, and a question and answer design. The allowance of anonymity prevents biases when reading other people's stories, as well as a greater feeling of safety when writing and sharing personal stories. Our hope is that users will feel empowered and enabled to share personal and compelling stories without the worry of judgment.

Users may take two main actions on the platform: ask a question or post a story in response to a question. Users are guided to ask good questions with placeholder text in the question text box. This feature prompts users to ask meaningful and appropriate questions that will help stimulate productive conversation.

Tapestry has a character minimum of 280 characters for answers, urging users to use long-form text and slowing down responses. This allows users to think through their responses and formulate personal, well-structured answers, avoiding reckless and hateful content that can occur from snap reactions to opposing viewpoints.

### Methods

Tapestry's design is centered around the user with the main focus on a user's experience throughout all user flows. In designing the application, we strived to place ourselves in the shoes of our users. Leading up to the final design, our design process consisted first of pen and paper sketches and then moved to low fidelity mockups, where we iterated multiples times. We then moved onto a medium-fidelity prototype that was

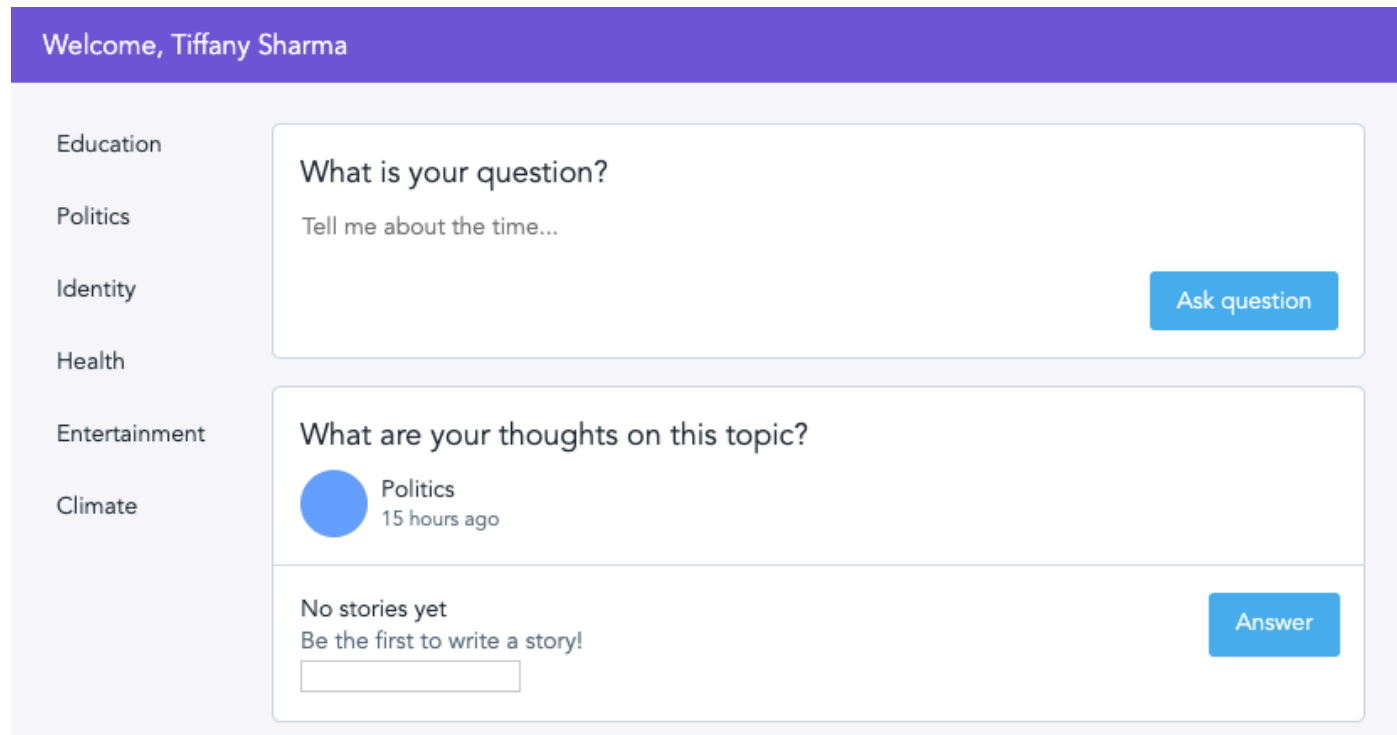


Figure 1. Our initial website prototype.

implemented with HTML, CSS, and Javascript using real-time data. From that medium-fidelity prototype, we continued to iterate until we landed on our final, polished high fidelity prototype to be put in front of users for testing. User testing is a key part of our process as it is the point where we test our hypothesis and test for usability.

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