Less Fright, More Delight: Community-Driven Gratitude Intervention for Teen Digital Well-being

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1 Introduction

The internet is an expansive space where interactions are dynamic and interconnected. For today's adolescents, their online experiences are shaped not only by personal choices but also by a diverse network of stakeholders—ranging from direct caregivers to broader social influences. Traditionally, parents, grandparents, and close peers have played a primary role in guiding and regulating teens' mobile technology use. However, as young people gain greater independence, their digital environments introduce new sources of influence, particularly through online communities and intergenerational networks that extend beyond their immediate social circles.

1.1 Online Communities as Key Stakeholders in Teens' Digital Lives

Many teens turn to online communities to find connections, opportunities, and shared values that may be harder to access offline [3, 15, 22]. These digital spaces—whether gaming forums, fandom networks, educational groups, or creative platforms—offer environments built *by* and *for* young people, where they can cultivate their identities and thrive [22]. Unlike offline relationships, which are often shaped by proximity and familial ties, online communities allow adolescents to curate their social circles around shared passions and values, giving them greater autonomy in shaping their social experiences.

However, the way teens engage with and interpret these digital experiences is often misunderstood or misaligned with the perspectives of offline stakeholders. This can lead to "context collapse" [5], where adolescents struggle to reconcile the expectations placed on them in offline settings with the norms and interactions they navigate online. For example, a parent might view extended gaming sessions as excessive screen time, while the teen sees it as a form of collaboration and social bonding. This misalignment emphasizes the need to recognize online communities as influential, complementary stakeholders in teens' digital well-being, rather than treating them as secondary to offline influences. Moreover, within digital spaces, teens often participate in multiple communities, each shaped by distinct social norms

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and values. These variations reinforce the importance of a nuanced, context-aware approach when considering how online environments shape adolescent experiences. Recognizing the unique role of online communities is thus essential to fully understanding and supporting teens' digital well-being.

Recognizing online communities as key stakeholders is also essential for designing effective, context-aware interventions. Different online communities and social identities bring with them distinct preferences for modes of behaviors [16] and justice notions [18]. Interventions that fail to account for these differences risk being ineffective or even counterproductive. By considering the social dynamics and unique norms of each community, interventions can be more tailored, context-sensitive, and better aligned with how teens view and handle harm in their digital spaces.

1.2 Community-Centered Approaches to Digital Well-being

Research has explored ways to engage individuals with their broader online communities to foster positive online behaviors through collective interventions rather than solely relying on individual self-regulation or platform-imposed policies. Several studies highlight group-based approaches as effective in tackling mobile technology overuse and distraction [12], mitigating cyberbullying [2, 7], encouraging reflection and sensemaking after sanctions [14]. These community-based models provide a socially and contextually adaptive approach to supporting its individuals, transferring community-specific knowledge that resonates with members' lived experiences. Instead of relying on top-down interventions, a collective reflection process can enable adolescents to navigate their online journeys more thoughtfully, reinforcing shared values while developing digital resilience.

Nevertheless, most existing research and interventions focus on harm prevention—addressing risks such as addiction, cyberbullying, and toxic interactions. This risk-oriented framing often reinforces a predominantly negative narrative about adolescent technology use, overlooking the ways in which teens actively cultivate positive digital experiences. Can a community-driven approach not only mitigate harm, but also celebrate and reinforce positive aspects of online engagement? Instead of merely restricting or correcting behaviors, how can we amplify strengths, creativity, and well-being within digital communities?

1.3 Gratitude Intervention as an Approach to Promote Digital Well-being

One promising avenue for fostering positive digital experiences is practicing gratitude, which has been shown to enhance well-being and strengthen social connections [6, 17]. Traditional gratitude practices, such as journaling, writing gratitude letters, and engaging in acts of kindness, have been found to increase life satisfaction while reducing stress and negative emotions [4, 21]. More recently, online gratitude interventions have taken various forms, including mobile apps, web-based journals, and social media integrations [8, 9, 11, 13, 19].

However, these interventions are often isolated from the social contexts in which people experience gratitude—either functioning as individual reflection exercises or as standalone platforms focused solely on gratitude sharing. As argued earlier, the environment in which digital interactions take place—whether online or offline—plays a significant role in shaping one's experiences and perceptions. Preliminary studies have suggested that the context in which gratitude is expressed significantly influences how it is perceived and experienced [1, 10]. Yet, existing gratitude interventions rarely consider these nuanced contextual influences or provide opportunities for community-driven engagement. Instead of treating gratitude expression as a separate, individual activity, we propose a community-centered approach that embeds gratitude reflection directly within online spaces where interactions naturally occur. This not only accounts for the diverse ways teens experience and interpret digital engagement but also introduces a more interactive and collaborative form of gratitude expression—one where users can contribute to, shape, and engage with collective reflections rather

than simply sharing or reacting to them. By integrating gratitude practices into existing online communities, rather than positioning them as stand-alone interventions, we aim to create a model that is more context-aware, socially meaningful, and seamlessly embedded into teens' digital experiences.

2 Design Proposal: Community-driven "Gratitude Journal"

Building on the motivations discussed above, we propose an initial design concept aimed at fostering a community-driven intervention: a "Gratitude Journal" tool that facilitates *collective* gratitude expression, *integrated within* online communities. This concept is still in its early ideation phase but is inspired by the potential impact of gratitude journals in offline mental health and well-being interventions, now reimagined for digital spaces.

2.1 Potential Research Setting: Discord

Discord serves as a compelling platform for this research due to its community-centered social structure and flexible API for tool integration. Unlike traditional social media that focuses on individual profiles, Discord is structured around servers — spaces where communities, ranging from small friend groups to large-scale networks, interact through topic-specific channels. These spaces are managed by community moderators who facilitate discussions, enforce guidelines and support members using a wide range of built-in functions, third-party tools, and notably, bots, which are increasingly popular across various servers [20].

Beyond its social structure, Discord's extensive API and interactive features allow for the development of custom bots, making it an ideal platform for implementing a collaborative gratitude journal. By embedding this system directly within a community's existing environment, the bot would enable members to collectively record, reflect on, and express gratitude, fostering a context-aware and socially driven reflection process. This approach ensures that gratitude expression is not an isolated practice but an integrated, interactive experience within the digital spaces where teens already engage.

2.2 Potential Implementation

To integrate gratitude reflection directly within online communities, we propose a Discord bot that allows members to easily participate in collective gratitude journaling. Through simple command-line interactions, members can document positive moments or experiences they've had within the community in a crowd-sourced manner. These entries may include shared achievements, meaningful conversations, or small acts of kindness that contributed to their sense of belonging and well-being in the respective community.

Beyond individual contributions, the system would facilitate interactive engagement, allowing members to review, comment on, or respond to others' reflections. In addition, these entries will be saved in an internal database, allowing members to review a collection of all gratitude records at any time using commands for easy access and retrieval. This not only fosters a sense of shared ownership over the collective well-being of the community but also reinforces peer-driven support and positive social norms.

2.3 Potential Research Outcomes

This study could offer insights into the effectiveness and applicability of a community-driven approach to gratitude reflection, particularly in contrast or complementary to individual-driven methods. Key research questions include:

2.3.1   Comparing individual vs. community-driven reflection: How does a community-based model differ from or complement an individual-driven approach? What are the advantages and limitations of each, and in what contexts might one be more effective than the other?

2.3.2   Understanding community-specific gratitude norms: How do different online communities shape the way gratitude is expressed and perceived? Gaining insight into these nuanced norms can inform the design of more tailored interventions that align with the social dynamics of specific digital spaces.

2.3.3   Bridging communication between stakeholders: The reflective outputs from the journal could serve as a means for teens to communicate the positive aspects of their digital experiences to other stakeholders, such as parents and educators. This could help reframe discussions about technology use, demonstrating how online engagement contributes to social support, personal growth, and well-being.

2.4   Open-Ended Questions to Explore

While this proposal outlines a structured community-driven reflection model, several open questions remain regarding its implementation and impact:

2.4.1   Personalization vs. structure: How can we enable flexible, community-specific modes of gratitude expression while maintaining a baseline structure to guide participation? For instance, some communities may prefer short text entries, while others may engage more through images, voice messages, or stickers.

2.4.2   Managing collaborative gratitude expression: How should the system handle potentially disruptive users? Would moderation mechanisms be necessary, and if so, what level of community-driven vs. automated moderation would be most effective?

2.4.3   Assessing impact across diverse communities: Given that community norms and engagement styles vary widely, how can we effectively evaluate the benefits and limitations of this approach? What metrics would best capture its influence on individual well-being and community cohesion?

3   Contribution to the Workshop

This work introduces a community-driven approach to gratitude reflection, extending traditional well-being interventions by embedding them within the social contexts where teens actively engage. By shifting away from isolated, individual-focused models, we explore how collective reflection can foster shared ownership, reinforce positive digital interactions, and support community well-being. Through this discussion, we aim to contribute to broader conversations on rethinking online interventions beyond harm prevention, emphasizing how community dynamics shape digital experiences. We hope this perspective sparks further exploration into socially embedded reflection practices, offering new ways to design interventions that empower teens to navigate and shape their digital spaces in a collaborative manner.

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