

Assessment 2: Community Analysis

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Introduction/Summary of Organization

The landscape of online communities is vast with many people joining together to share ideas. These online communities can include multiple subcommunities inside a larger one much like the organization of the Reddit platform, where separate communities share one infrastructure. Reddit.com is one of the most active online communities in the world, with over 172,710,261 unique visitors to the site in May 2015 (Bassett, 2018). The website consists of news articles that meet a particular interest and ‘subreddits’ which focus on specific topics. These ‘subreddits’ comprise smaller, individual and focused communities within the broader Reddit community.

The subreddits in Reddit.com provide unique opportunities for members who identify with a specific topic, to contribute and participate in the online community and create social connections around shared interests. The discussions, articles, pictures, and videos that are posted in these subreddits provide information that is validated from the collective experience. Community members can then comment on articles, post responses and interact with other community members about each topic of interest (see Appendix D). In the active platform, members submit, comment and rate the topic-based posts in each discussion forum. Users can “upvote” or “downvote” posts and the submissions are moderated by community managers. These metrics are measured by the feedback from the number of upvotes and downvotes (Tan & Lee, 2015). The collection of common items of interest is one element of what help drive the community aspect of Reddit.

Many companies understand the importance of community management and push resources toward the growth of these communities under the guidance of a community management team. However, Reddit, since it’s early years, has employed a different strategy.

The online communities are allowed to flourish without much interference and control is distributed to subreddit moderators, who customize the community experience (Spinks, 2014). Community goals organically arise from the instant feedback of upvoted posts. Moderators support each other by forming their own subreddit where tools are designed and shared for the benefit of each specialized group (Spinks, 2014). In essence, Reddit grows and expands its reach by letting the community drive the development of the product.

Setting Goals

Measuring the success of the online community begins with setting clear goals that have a level of specificity and can be reasonably and consistently measured. A determination about what metrics should be measured is based on the type of audience, platform, interaction space, user experience goals, content and how that content is generated (Kraut & Resnick, 2011). Tan & Lee (2015) propose that online multi-community settings such as Reddit, have different dynamics that may not be evident in individual online communities. These include the movement among communities with users posting to at least two new communities for every ten posts (Tan & Lee, 2015). Moderators of the subreddits examined, outlined five targeted areas that are the focus of their work in the online community. These include attracting the target audience, creating a niche, managing the community space through direct moderation of posts, building identity and communicating group norms. According to a subreddit moderator, although one of their goals include attracting new members, he admits that this does not follow an aggressively executed plan (mods@iamaofficial.com, personal communication, February 14 & 15, 2018).

The smaller topic-based forums inside Reddit function as niche communities which are specific groups built around people who form around a shared interest, service or brand (Kraut & Resnick, 2011). The cultural norms, common language and online friendships inside a niche

community are related to the consistent interactions of members, and each audience has different needs and goals (Kraut & Resnick, 2011). This, therefore, means that each community functions as its own entity and community managers strive to craft an interaction space that encourages audience participation and contribution in specific ways. The members in each subreddit identify with the community as a whole and form what Kraut and Resnick (2011) call “identity-based attachment” as they continue their participation in the group.

Moving Towards Goals

To meet goals, moderators of subreddits engage in several different tasks. With the convenience of having anywhere between two and over 30 moderators, tasks set out to accomplish the subreddit’s goals can easily be achieved, especially with larger groups. Most goals identified by interviewed subreddits include attracting a target audience, creating a niche, managing the community space, building identity and communicating norms.

Moderators from the computer science and history teachers subreddits reported that to reach their target audience or potential members, they rely on “word of mouth.” CSEducation moderator, AustinCorgiBart acknowledged that advertisements of their subreddit at the Special Interest Group on Computer Science Education (SIGCSE) conference website might be helpful to gain more members (personal communication, February 15, 2018). Additionally, the CSEducation moderator believed that users arrived by accident or based on connections from a conference or through collaborating on a paper. It is also possible that users find their way to a specific subreddit through other subreddits. Subscribers or users may find their way to r/historyteachers through r/education or r/teachers “or searching google for a history teacher forum or history teacher specific questions that may have already been asked/answered here” (AustinCorgiBart, personal communication, February 15, 2018). The use of a Twitter handle and

advertisement through the posts of users helps IAmA reach their target audience. IAmA posts have also frequently made it to the front page of Reddit, which all users will see, possibly enticing them to subscribe. This type of Twitter advertising becomes wildly popular when celebrities post information about their upcoming AMAs on their social media channels. Brian from IAmA provides a reminder that when engaging an audience it “is a convenient tool for companies to point at and say "look! all these people are talking!" but it is not necessarily indicative of the impact an online community is having on the Internet at large or larger cultural impacts” (Personal communication, February 14 & 15, 2018).

To create a niche, moderators label the subreddit for example as r/ushistoryteachers or r/undergradhistoryteachers, and this increases members’ commitment to the community and helps to define its scope and niche (Kraut & Resnick, 2011). According to AustinCorgiBart, the moderator for the subreddit created for members interested in Computer Science Education:

The scope of the community is to discuss topics related to improving and understanding Computer Science Education. Our goal is to improve and understand how people learn to program and engage with computing. Our niche is that we serve Redditors in the CS Ed community, which distinguishes us from the CS Ed facebook groups and mailing lists.

This can be a more casual environment, and encourage more conversational topics and link sharing (Personal communication, February 15, 2018).

To manage the community space and communicate norms, moderators spend a few minutes each day, browsing and removing posts that do not fit the goals and norms of the community. These norms are not explicitly stated but are implied as a consensus:

The community through action, inaction, and voting has told us what they want the community to be. When we created the sub, I thought there would be a lot more sharing

of created lessons and content. While there is some of that, the community doesn't show a preference to it (hksteve, personal communication, February 15, 2018).

Kraut and Resnick (2011) suggest that “having a rough consensus about normative behaviors can help the community achieve its mission” (p.126). Hksteve, moderator of the subreddit r/historyteachers says, “I have the moderation que [sic] set as my homepage so I can see what's happening on the sub a few times a day. Automoderator does a lot to keep out would be spammers or bad actors” (Personal communication, February 15, 2018). This practice is in line with research from Kraut and Resnick (2011) who advise active management and regulation of behaviors inside the online community to prevent off-topic disruptions and minimize threats.

Moderators are aware that there are other social communities related to their work, but their subreddit has a specific context. To create and preserve their own identity, moderators of each subreddit employ unique strategies. r/Historyteachers has added user flair to allow users to show pride in a specific area of expertise (hksteve, personal communication, February 15, 2018). Some subreddits are loosely defined communities that are more open-ended and less niche than others and there are similar subreddits out there, which in other venues might be seen as “competitors.” Moderators also observe the direction and quantity of the posts and which ones get upvoted most. In some cases, an increase in specific topics would lead the moderator to divide the group and create another subreddit. The moderator for r/Historyteachers subreddit, hksteve, explains:

If we got hundreds of thousands of users, or the need called for it, the sub would probably organically break off into [r/ushistoryteachers](#) or [r/undergradhistoryteachers](#), but right now we're pretty far from that. We added user flair to show off where a user is at or show pride in a chosen field of expertise, but it wasn't meant to dissect to community and I don't

think it has. If a new econ teacher has a question, he or she will get answers from anyone. Obviously, social science teachers and teachers in general are asked to teach from a buffet of subjects so shutting all US History teachers into their own "room" would deprive a World History discussion from users who can share their valuable input.

(Personal communication, February 15, 2018).

Ultimately, as certain subreddits gain popularity, they may end up having more significant impacts on the Internet. Brian from IAmA said, "IAmA defined an interview format that became wildly popular with people and those AMAs have stretched across the Internet, to mainstream media, to Europe, Asia, Australia, and even some of Earth's most remote places."

Data and Metrics

Data is an essential tool to the success of online communities. The Monumental Guide to Building Online Communities (Mack Web Solutions, n.d.) suggests to "track the right things" to understand what the numerical data means (p. 49). Making use of tools to help collect and measure data can ultimately measure the efforts of those running an online community.

Tracking members, posts, messages, images, videos, and collaborative projects are all ways in which data and metrics can play an important role in online communities.

In the Reddit world, a central focus is how many people are members of the online community. Whatcouldgowrong moderators stated that they are just looking to see that the number of subreddit subscribers increases each day to consider their work a success (Personal communication, February 14, 2018). A different moderator of the subreddit historyteachers, hksteve, relies on the default data provided by Reddit itself to gain a better understanding of the inner workings of the community (Personal communication, February 15, 2018). This consists of growth charts and other available data, which can also be accessed on redditmetrics.com. The

most valuable data collected and used by the subreddit IAmA is what is being removed, according to one of the moderators, Brian (Personal communication, February 14 & 15, 2018). He suggests that this is useful information because they want to know why content might be getting taken down, if there is a pattern to this content loss, if it is a mistake, a failure to communicate, and if this is something that can be fixed with technology. This subreddit also makes use of the default Reddit data of user numbers and page views. Some subreddits, like CSEducation, are not necessarily interested in measuring engagement or the impact of the online community beyond what goes on in the subreddit itself (AustinCorgiBart, personal communication, February 15, 2018).

Depending on the goals of a subreddit, moderators use certain types of data to track what they need to know, but sometimes wish there was other information available for use. For example, a CSEducation moderator, AustinCorgiBart suggested that "...it'd be nice to know if the community members are happy with the posts they're seeing" (Personal communication, February 15, 2018). Brian from IAmA commented that they wish they could collect data in more ways, but because Reddit moderators do not have access "to Reddit's backend we can't really get too much more without running into time, resource, and legal feasibility issues" (Personal communication, February 14 & 15, 2018).

Conclusion

The Reddit community is an overall successful community. This is evidenced in the interactions that occur within the communities and their ability to sustain membership. Based on discussions with various subreddit moderators, the Reddit strategy of allowing the community to flourish organically and without excessive management interference is a large part of it's

success. The members determine the type and depth of content and moderators assist by categorizing their contributions.

The very nature of Reddit encourages the sharing of ideas, articles, and postings of interest by people who are not geographically defined. As a single platform that houses multiple online communities, the decision to design globally defined subspaces or subreddits is a winning strategy. Users who visit each subreddit will have the same view of content, and this enhances the shared context (Kraut & Resnick, 2011). Additionally, the moderators of the subreddits make decisions to split the interaction space and create new subreddits based on the number of user posts on a popular topic. This encourages sustained interest and contributions among its members.

The collection of data within the community helps leaders in the community analyze the status of the community and make decisions to better the community. Aligned to suggestions from research, this strategy provides a benefit to the growth of the community, as the decision-makers observe the organically occurring conversations and create spaces based on the interests of members (Kraut & Resnick, 2011).

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Appendix A

Communications between Stephanie Peborde Burke and Reddit Moderators:

February 15, 2018

r/CSEducation Online Communities

[–]to /r/CSEducation

Hello! I'm an educational technology doctoral student. My group is collecting information for a class assignment, not big research. Would you be able to participate in a short interview/answer some questions? Thank you!

[–]from AustinCorgiBart[M] via /r/CSEducation

Sure, I suppose.

[–]to AustinCorgiBart[M] via /r/CSEducation

Ok, thank you! Here's a little more background: My name is Stephanie and I'm a doctoral student at New Jersey City University in the Educational Technology Leadership Program.

I am working with colleagues to do general research about online communities. This is not for a big research assignment or journal article, just a class project/paper. Our main goal is to get some understanding of the work that goes into planning and organizing your online community and the specific actions you have taken to reach specific objectives. For this project we need to hear from three individuals from the online community management team who have key roles. In the Reddit world, those key people would be the moderators.

To simplify things we designed a brief 10-question, open-ended questionnaire to capture your thoughts.

Vision

What is the scope of the online community? What do you seek to >accomplish through this design?

How do you carve a niche and manage competition?

How has the organization benefitted as a result of the online >community?

Growth/Expansion

Is there more to come, more to be developed within this online >community?

What resources are put into managing and expanding the online >community? How do you reach your target audience or potential >members?

How do you analyze growth, community performance, community >success?

Metrics and Data

What kind of data about the community is important to you based >on your goals? How do you collect data?

How do you measure engagement and the impact of the online >community?

How do users typically arrive in the online community?

Is the design based on a single interaction space? Or are there >other “rooms” or “pages” for specific member needs? Were these >changes or other modifications and customizations to this >subreddit intentional?

[–]from [AustinCorgiBart\[M\]](#) via [/r/CSEducation](#) to [AustinCorgiBart\[M\]](#)

Did you send me some questions? I can't find them now.

[–]to [AustinCorgiBart\[M\]](#) via [/r/CSEducation](#)

I did. Here's everything again:

Ok, thank you! Here's a little more background: My name is Stephanie and I'm a doctoral student at New Jersey City University in the Educational Technology Leadership Program.

I am working with colleagues to do general research about online communities. This is not for a big research assignment or journal article, just a class project/paper. Our main goal is to get some understanding of the work that goes into planning and organizing your online community and the specific actions you have taken to reach specific objectives. For this project we need to hear from three individuals from the online community management team who have key roles. In the Reddit world, those key people would be the moderators.

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[–]from [AustinCorgiBart\[M\]](#) via [/r/CSEducation](#)

I've answered the questions below. I don't know that we're really a community that will fit your expected questions, though :)

What is the scope of the online community? What do you seek to >accomplish through this design?

The scope of the community is to discuss topics related to improving and understanding Computer Science Education. Our goal is to improve and understand how people learn to program and engage with computing.

How do you carve a niche and manage competition?

Our niche is that we serve Redditors in the CS Ed community, which distinguishes us from the CS Ed facebook groups and mailing lists. This can be a more casual environment, and encourage more conversational topics and link sharing.

How has the organization benefitted as a result of the online >community?

I don't know that it's been a huge benefit, but I've certainly enjoyed our community. I suppose there has been more connections between our members than there would have been otherwise.

Is there more to come, more to be developed within this online >community?

Nothing on my agenda, I'd like to have more members but we're a niche community.

What resources are put into managing and expanding the online >community? How do you reach your target audience or potential >members?

The only real resource is a few spare minutes for moderation. That's usually done on-the-fly as I browse reddit for fun, and I see a post that doesn't belong in our sub. We've reached our target members mostly via word-of-mouth. Now that you mention it, we should probably put an advertisement somewhere at SIGCSE (our main conference), at some point.

How do you analyze growth, community performance, community >success?

We don't.

What kind of data about the community is important to you based >on your goals? How do you collect data?

I suppose it'd be nice to know if the community members are happy with the posts they're seeing.

How do you measure engagement and the impact of the online >community?

We don't.

How do users typically arrive in the online community?

I suppose accidentally. We only have a few people, and we all mostly know each other IRL from conferences and papers.

Is the design based on a single interaction space? Or are there >other “rooms” or “pages” for specific member needs? Were these >changes or other modifications and customizations to this >subreddit intentional?

Well, as I mentioned before there are other social communities related to us (The SIGCSE Members listserv, and the CS Ed Facebook groups). This one is just more casual and for redditors.

[–]to [AustinCorgiBart\[M\]](#) via [/r/CSEducation](#)

Thank you so much! We're happy to get any feedback, so we're really appreciative you were able to take the time to do this :)

February 15, 2018

[/r/historyteachers](#) Online Communities

[–]to [/r/historyteachers](#)

Hello! I'm an educational technology doctoral student. My group is collecting information for a class assignment, not big research. Would you be able to participate in a short interview/answer some questions? Thank you!

[–]from [hksteve\[M\]](#) via [/r/historyteachers](#)

1. retro feel free to take this one
2. tursipax, can you provide proof that you are who you say you are?

[–]from [Retro21\[M\]](#) via [/r/historyteachers](#)

Yes, no worries, fire over the questions. As long as they aren't too personal I'm fine with that :)

[–]to [hksteve\[M\]](#) via [/r/historyteachers](#)

Sure! I know my lack of activity on here is suspect. Here is my doctoral portfolio <http://www.geekygoggles.com/> If you want to see my student ID, I am happy to send it to an email address.

[–]to [Retro21\[M\]](#) via [/r/historyteachers](#)

Thanks! Nothing personal at all, it's just about this subreddit's online community.

Vision

What is the scope of the online community? What do you seek to accomplish through this design?

How do you carve a niche and manage competition?

How has the organization benefitted as a result of the online community?

Growth/Expansion

Is there more to come, more to be developed within this online community?

What resources are put into managing and expanding the online community? How do you reach your target audience or potential members?

How do you analyze growth, community performance, community success?

Metrics and Data

What kind of data about the community is important to you based on your goals? How do you collect data?

How do you measure engagement and the impact of the online community?

How do users typically arrive in the online community?

Is the design based on a single interaction space? Or are there other “rooms” or “pages” for specific member needs? Were these changes or other modifications and customizations to this subreddit intentional?

[–]from [hksteve\[M\]](#) via [/r/historyteachers](#)

Retro feel free to add more.

What is the scope of the online community? What do you seek to accomplish through this design? It's a place for any social science educators to meet, discuss, share ideas, and ask questions. We're not actively seeking to accomplish much outside of the community we've already developed.

How do you carve a niche and manage competition? We just made the subreddit as a history teachers corner of reddit like any other community in a "if you build it, they will come" manner. I wouldn't say either of us do anything to manage competition. I think educators in general are pretty open with their information and methods.

How has the organization benefitted as a result of the online community? The community through action, inaction, and voting has told us what they want the community to be. When we created the sub, I thought there would be a lot more sharing of created lessons and content. While there is some of that, the community doesn't show a preference too it.

Is there more to come, more to be developed within this online community? Via active planning? Not on our end, not sure what Reddit administrators are planning.

What resources are put into managing and expanding the online community? How do you reach your target audience or potential members? I have the moderation que set as my home page so I can see what's happening on the sub a few times a day. Automoderator does a lot to keep out would be spammers or bad actors. We don't actively target members, we just exist and they find us.

How do you analyze growth, community performance, community success? About once a year, I'll check the growth charts and post what I find (a little behind on this years). We've grown steadily, probably slower than Reddit as a whole, but the people who do come seem to fit right in. Performance and success is just measured in feedback. As long as people are

responding with questions and using their votes to reward content and discussion, that's success to me.

What kind of data about the community is important to you based on your goals? How do you collect data? Default data from Reddit admins given to all moderators.

How do users typically arrive in the online community? I imagine after finding [r/education](#), [r/teachers](#), or searching google for a history teacher forum or history teacher specific questions that may have already been asked/answered here.

Is the design based on a single interaction space? Or are there other "rooms" or "pages" for specific member needs? Were these changes or other modifications and customizations to this subreddit intentional? If we got hundreds of thousands of users, or the need called for it, the sub would probably organically break off into [r/ushistoryteachers](#) or [r/undergradhistoryteachers](#), but right now we're pretty far from that. We added user flair to show off where a user is at or show pride in a chosen field or expertise, but it wasn't meant to dissect to community and I don't think it has. If a new econ teacher has a question, he or she will get answers from anyone. Obviously, social science teachers and teachers in general are asked to teach from a buffet of subjects so shutting all US History teachers into their own "room" would deprive a World History discussion from users who can share their valuable input.

[–]from [Retro21\[M\]](#) via [/r/historyteachers](#) to [hksteve\[M\]](#)
don't think I need to, that was a great reply!

[–]to [hksteve\[M\]](#) via [/r/historyteachers](#)
Awesome, thank you soooo much!

February 14, 2018

[r/Whatcouldgowrong](#) Online Communities

[–]to [/r/Whatcouldgowrong](#)
Hello! I'm an educational technology doctoral student and I'd like to contact you for a brief chat if possible. My group is collecting information for a class assignment, not big research. Would you be able to participate in a short interview/answer some questions? Thank you!

[–]from [pHorniCaiTe\[M\]](#) via [/r/Whatcouldgowrong](#)
You might get better results from [/r/samplesize](#). I don't mind participating personally but the lack of activity on your account is suspect if I'm being honest.

[–]to [pHorniCaiTe\[M\]](#) via [/r/Whatcouldgowrong](#)
Thanks for the suggestion. Yes, I know my lack of activity isn't much help when reaching out to moderators. My group has been reaching out to key people on all different social media platforms for over a week with no success. Redditors have been the best so far at returning our messages :) If you'd like to participate, here's a little more background info and the questions. If you need any clarification or have questions, please let me know. Thank you!!!

My name is Stephanie and I'm a doctoral student at New Jersey City University in the Educational Technology Leadership Program.

I am working with colleagues to do general research about online communities. This is not for a big research assignment or journal article, just a class project/paper. Our main goal is to get some understanding of the work that goes into planning and organizing your online community and the specific actions you have taken to reach specific objectives. For this project we need to hear from three individuals from the online community management team who have key roles. In the Reddit world, those key people would be the moderators.

To simplify things we designed a brief 10-question, open-ended questionnaire to capture your thoughts.

Vision What is the scope of the online community? What do you seek to accomplish through this design? How do you carve a niche and manage competition? How has the organization benefited as a result of the online community?

Growth/Expansion Is there more to come, more to be developed within this online community? What resources are put into managing and expanding the online community? How do you reach your target audience or potential members? How do you analyze growth, community performance, community success?

Metrics and Data What kind of data about the community is important to you based on your goals? How do you collect data? How do you measure engagement and the impact of the online community? How do users typically arrive in the online community? Is the design based on a single interaction space? Or are there other “rooms” or “pages” for specific member needs? Were these changes or other modifications and customizations to this subreddit intentional?

[–]subreddit message via [/r/Whatcouldgowrong](#)[M]

Hi Stephanie, thanks for reaching out. Reddit is a weird place, and while I think your research questions may allow you to do general research about online *reddit communities*, I don't think that these types of questions would allow you to conclude info about online communities on the internet in general.

[/r/Whatcouldgowrong](#) is a subreddit page I created years ago when I was in high school, where the content is generally just light hearted and humorous content. While you could call everyone who subscribes to WCGW a "community" technically, it's more so a collection of redditors with many interests who all happen to be entertained by the type of content that WCGW provides. In a way, [/r/whatcouldgowrong](#) is slightly different than a community like [/r/overwatch](#) for example. That would be an example of Redditors who all share a super common and specific interest, which fits the definition of a community a bit more. We do still consider [/r/whatcouldgowrong](#) a community, but I don't think there are any die-hard fans of specific gifs that show people doing silly things and "wrong" results happening.

While we are close to a million followers, it's surprisingly easy to maintain our community. And while your questions are really well thought out, you may see that in the context of subreddits on reddit, the answers are a little weird. We don't really seek to accomplish anything; I guess perhaps the content suggests that stupid ideas have stupid consequences. We carved a niche because we are the only [/r/whatcouldgowrong](#) there is. By definition, it's already its own concept and there can't be multiple subreddits with the same name, so that automatically eliminates the competition. You could call [/r/holdmybeer](#) or [/r/nononono](#) competitors if you stretched that definition, but Reddit doesn't really work that way. As far as

analyzing growth, community performance, and success, that's simple. The number of subscribers go up each day, and then we call it a success.

We also don't really have goals. We're just happy to exist and be a platform where people can submit amusing internet gifs. We don't do research or other fancy things like that. There are no other rooms or pages...

I could go on, but I think it would be wasting your time probably. Moderators on Reddit don't get paid; there isn't any need to analyze data and assess growth and manage goals.. at least on a comedic gif sharing subreddit that will increase in subscribers regardless of what we do.

Hope this helps!

[–]to [/r/Whatcouldgowrong](#)

Thank you so much! This is great information. I really appreciate it.

Appendix B

Email Communications with Reddit IAmA Moderators

To: mods@iamaofficial.com

From: speborde@gmail.com

Date: Wednesday, February 14, 2018

Hello!

I hope you're well. I am reaching out to ask if you would be able to participate in a short interview/survey. I'm a doctoral student at New Jersey City University in the Educational Technology Leadership Program.

I am working with colleagues to do general research about online communities and we all agreed that Reddit would be a great choice for study.

This is not for a big research assignment or journal article. Our main goal is to get some understanding of the work that goes into planning and organizing your online community and the specific actions you have taken to reach specific objectives. Including yourself, we would like to speak with two other individuals from the online community management team who have key roles. Could you share their information with me as well?

We understand that there are so many demands on your time, so we designed a brief 10-question open-ended questionnaire to get your thoughts. The questions are below the email. If you feel that any questions are not applicable, you can just say so in your response. Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Kindest regards,
Stephanie Peborde

Interview Questions

Full Name and Job Title:

Vision

1. What is the scope of the online subreddit community? What do you seek to accomplish through this design?
2. How do you carve a niche and manage competition?
3. How has this group benefitted as a result of the online community?

Growth/Expansion

1. Is there more to come, more to be developed within this online community?

2. What resources are put into managing and expanding the online community? How do you reach your target audience or potential members?
3. How do you analyze growth, community performance, community success?
- 4.

Metrics and Data

1. What kind of data about the community is important to you based on your goals? How do you collect data?
2. How do you measure engagement and the impact of the online community?
3. How do users typically arrive in the online community?
4. Is the design based on a single interaction space? Or are there other “rooms” or “pages” or “hashtags” for specific member needs? Were these changes or other modifications and customizations to this subreddit intentional?

To: speborde@gmail.com

From: mods@iamaofficial.com

Date: Thursday, February 15, 2018

Vision

1. What is the scope of the online subreddit community? What do you seek to accomplish through this design?

IAmA is a forum for crowd sourced interviews with people from all walks of life. It started largely as a way to ask questions you'd be too afraid or embarrassed to ask in person. This format proved wildly popular eventually becoming a juggernaut on the Internet hosting people like Barack Obama, Bill Gates, and many others.

Our goals focus almost entirely on maintaining high quality content. This involves a lot of brainstorming and trial and error for different tools and protocols that improve the quality of AMAs without becoming so onerous as to dissuade people from posting at all. Because we are volunteers we don't have a lot of the pressure social media companies place on growth and engagement and we often play with new tools. We were early adopters of Slack, for example, and our newest tool we're playing with is something called TruePic which should help provide better proof for AMAs.

2. How do you carve a niche and manage competition?

Carving a niche on Reddit is largely a function of being in the right place at the right time. IAmA spun out of AskReddit several years ago when the format didn't really fit for AskReddit but the content was still wildly popular.

We have had a lot of "competitors" throughout the years. Some of which have included media companies with large budgets to throw at attempting to produce AMAs. We've always stood way out in front of these projects but the best way to compete is to focus on the quality of the content coming in. People show up because the content is good;

not because the engagement numbers are off the charts.

3. How has this group benefitted as a result of the online community?

Our mod group spans the globe and we are mostly a group of working professionals. Building the community is something fun we enjoy doing together.

Growth/Expansion

1. Is there more to come, more to be developed within this online community?

There's always more. The Internet is constantly changing.

What resources are put into managing and expanding the online community? How do you reach your target audience or potential members?

We use our twitter handle, @reddit_AMA. We rely on the advertising efforts of our guests. We also routinely have posts hit the front page of Reddit.

2. How do you analyze growth, community performance, community success?

We have hard numbers we can look at but they're largely a reflection of the quality of the content. The moderators are more like an editorial board looking at what people want to read and how to help guests tell their stories.

- 3.

Metrics and Data

1. What kind of data about the community is important to you based on your goals? How do you collect data?

Our most useful data comes from our removals—why is content getting taken down? Is there a pattern? Is it a user mistake or is it something we're failing to communicate? Can we fix it with tech? etc.

We have reddit's data for unique user numbers and page views.

We would love more ways to collect data about AMAs but as volunteer mods without access to Reddit's backend we can't really get too much more without running into time, resource, and legal feasibility issues.

2. How do you measure engagement and the impact of the online community?

User engagement is a convenient tool for companies to point at and say "look! all these people are talking!" but it's not necessarily indicative of the impact an online community is having on the Internet at large or larger cultural impacts. IAMA defined an interview format that became wildly popular with people and those AMAs have stretched across the Internet, to mainstream media, to Europe, Asia, Australia, and even some of Earth's most remote places. We don't really have a good measure for that kind

of impact and a bunch of people in one place talking isn't necessarily an indication that those conversations are worth while.

3. How do users typically arrive in the online community?

Most likely through Twitter for new users. When celebrities advertise their AMAs they use their social media channels and Twitter is a popular avenue for this.

4. Is the design based on a single interaction space? Or are there other “rooms” or “pages” or "hashtags" for specific member needs? Were these changes or other modifications and customizations to this subreddit intentional?

Each AMA gets its own page. There are no hashtags or folder tools. Our link flair used to work like that but reddit broke it intentionally when trying to move away from relying on CSS.

Additional reading:

My NYT op-ed: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/08/opinion/why-we-shut-down-reddits-ask-me-anything-forum.html>

My WIRED piece about hate speech: <https://www.wired.com/2015/08/reddit-mods-handle-hate-speech/>

A piece I wrote on LinkedIn about starting communities and a new project I work on called LawyerSmack: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/aint-party-like-internet-how-build-online-community-why-brian-lynch/>

Other mods may flesh out some of my answers here or add more. Please don't hesitate to ask if you have any questions.

All my best,

Brian

/r/IAmA Mod Team

mods@iamaofficial.com

iama.reddit.com

Appendix C

Subreddit Backgrounds

From here: <https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/wiki/index>

Basically, [/r/IAmA](https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA) is a place to interview people, but in a new way. "IAmA" is the traditional way of beginning the description of who you are; "AMA" is the traditional way of ending the description; the acronym means "Ask me anything." The interviewee begins the process by starting a post, describing who they are and what they do. Then, commenters leave questions and can vote on other questions according to which they would like to see answered. The interviewee then goes through and responds to any questions that he/she would like, and in any way that he/she prefers.

Moderator: Brian (mods@iamofficial.com)

From here: <https://www.reddit.com/r/Whatcouldgowrong/>

Welcome to [/r/whatcouldgowrong](https://www.reddit.com/r/Whatcouldgowrong/), the home of stupid ideas and their consequences. Grab a chair and popcorn, sit back, and you're all set.

1) Golden Rule: Links must contain a stupid idea and something going wrong.

Moderator: pHornicaiTe

From here: <https://www.reddit.com/r/historyteachers/>

World, U.S., Social Studies, Geography..., all the subjects where so many don't understand why they need to learn them.

Share your cool class projects, interesting internet sources, funny memes involving teaching, whatever the community will let you get away with.

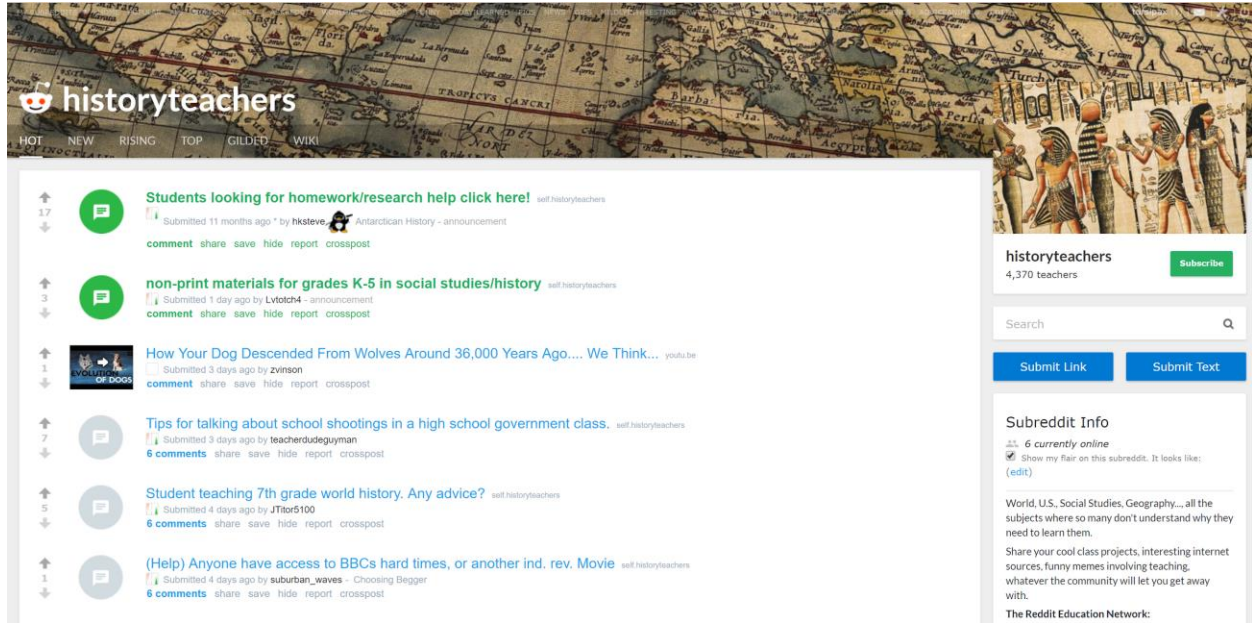
Moderator: hksteve, Retro21

From here: <https://www.reddit.com/r/CSEducation/>

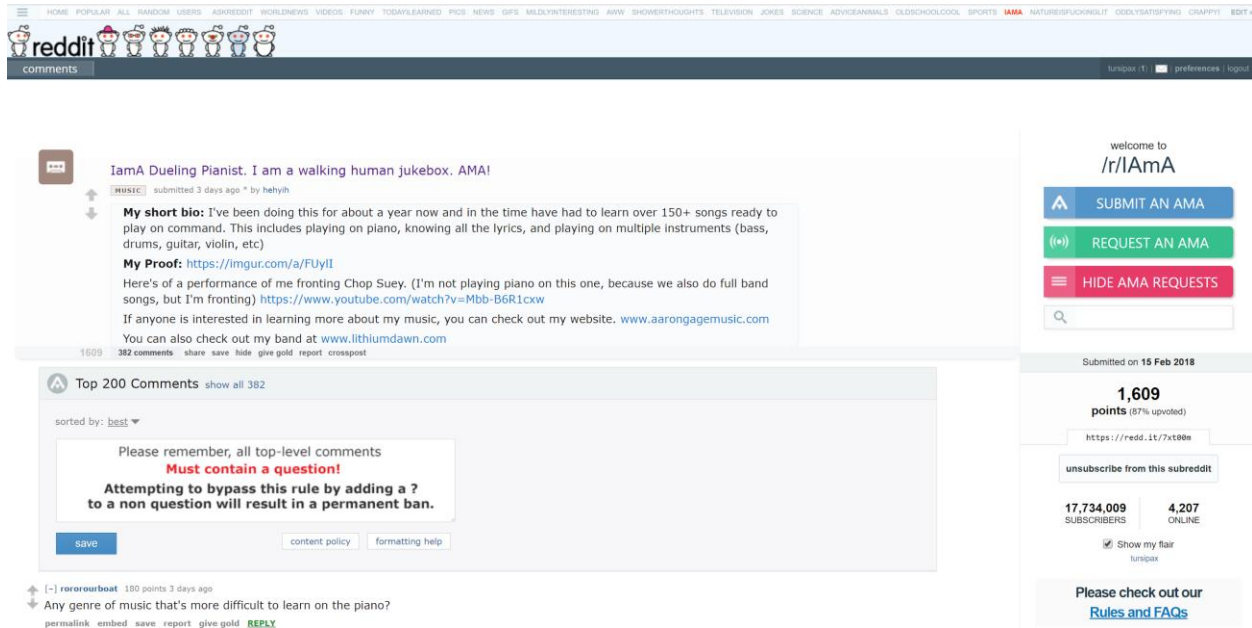
A subreddit for computer science educators and education researchers. Discussion and links of CS ed research, best practices, pedagogy, curriculum, policy, etc.

Moderator: AustinCorgiBart

Appendix D Screenshot of r/historyteachers



Screenshot of r/IAmA post and comments



Screenshot of r/IAmA post and comments



[Click here](#) to request being added to our calendar.

[Click here](#) to search AMAs by category!

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AMAs are scheduled in Eastern Time (GMT-4:00).

Date	Time	Person	Description
19 Feb	5pm	Jason Matthews	Former CIA officer and author of RED SPARROW
20 Feb	12:30pm	Chris Hughes	Author, Co-Founder of Facebook
20 Feb	1pm	Simon Whistler / Davey Wiskey	Hosts of the TodayFoundOut YouTube Channel (and more)
20 Feb	2pm	Linnea Crowther and Maureen O'Donnell	Professional Obituary Writers
20 Feb	2:30pm	Meredith Bleicher	Eisenhower Foundation, Executive Director
21 Feb	12pm	Neal Moore	Author: Down the Mississippi: A Modern-day Huck Finn
21 Feb	2pm	Jonathan Park	Democratic Candidate for Congress - Virginia's 11th District
21 Feb	2pm	Sandro Manfredini and Amitabh Diesel	Developers of Horizon Chase Turbo
22 Feb	11am	Lynne Canavan - Open Fog Consortium	Fog Computing Experts
1 Mar	12pm	Nordland, Cyrus, Bob, Tom and Brandon	Nitaku Games: Adult Gaming Platform
2		Miguel de	Started Mono and