CS 6474 Social Computing: Background

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What attracts people most, it would appear, is other people.
— William Whyte
The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces

- Whyte led the Street Life project in the 1970s, and began investigating the various dynamics of urban spaces.
- He focused on the city, and studied New York City’s parks, plazas, and various informal recreational areas like city blocks -- a total of 16 plazas, 3 small parks.
- Goal: 1) why do some city spaces work for people while others don’t, and 2) what the practical implications might be about living better, more joyful lives in our urban environment.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_9g5qkobY
Observation 0: Some plazas are successful, and some not so much.
Observation 1: The rituals in street encounters
Observation 2: Reciprocity of street gestures
Observations 3: Interplay of sun, wind, trees, and water (it’s advantageous to “hoard” the sun and amplify its light in some cases, and to obscure it in others)
Observation 4: Urban parks were an integral mechanism for stimulating our interaction with the city.
Observation 5: Music and entertainers in the urban space bond people together; however not due to their excellence
Others: Whyte considered the problem of urban “undesirables -- drunks, drug dealers.” How can you protect an urban space from such elements?
Summary: Urban design needs to account for creating physical places that facilitate civic engagement and community interaction
A brief history...
IRCs and forums were early “social”

- IRC – Internet Relay Chat, very early rudimentary application layer protocol that supported text based message exchange
  - Allow file sharing
  - Private and multi-way group chat (latter also known as channels)
IRCs and forums were early “social”

- Forums – message boards or an online discussion site where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages
  - Mostly one-to-many sharing of content; threaded response structure
  - Messages are often longer than one line of text, and are typically temporarily archived
  - Presence of a “moderator”
The advent of modern social computing came when digital systems began to process user-generated content and make use of it for their own purposes – which often involved producing new functionality and value for their users.
An early example...

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo

2,580 Reviews

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<td>1</td>
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Average Customer Review

5 stars: (2,580 customer reviews)

Share your thoughts with other customers

Create your own review

Search Customer Reviews

Go

Only search this product's reviews

The most helpful favorable review

1,967 of 2,108 people found the following review helpful:

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐ This Swedish bestseller deserves to be a blockbuster here too.

A 24-year-old computer hacker sporting an assortment of tattoos and body piercings

The most helpful critical review

590 of 711 people found the following review helpful:

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐ Less than I expected but still interesting

Henrik Vanger, an elderly Swedish industrialist, has long been receiving the...
Where do I find social computing today?

- Places on the web where individuals and groups create and exchange content and engage in person-to-person conversations.
  - blogs and microblogs, forums and message boards, social networks, wikis, virtual worlds, social bookmarking, tagging and news, digital storytelling and scrapbooking, and data, content, image and video sharing, podcast portals, and collective intelligence.
- Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat, MySpace, Flickr, WordPress, Blogger, LiveJournal, Wikipedia, Second Life, Reddit, Tumblr
Purposes of social computing systems

- Social interaction
  - Twitter, Instagram, blogs, LinkedIn, Google+
- Maintaining friendships/contacts
  - Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+
- Social curation
  - Reddit, Pinterest, blogs, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Google+
- Content sharing
  - Reddit, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Pinterest, blogs, Flickr, YouTube
- Q&A, recommendations
  - Twitter, Facebook

- General goal: Better connecting, decision making
Purposes of social computing systems

- Ubiquity of social computing systems
  - Recent advances in smartphone and tablet technologies, access to tailored, social information anytime, anywhere

- Serve as a “backchannel” to real events
  - People at real-world meetings tapping into an electronic swirl of commentary and interpretation by other participants – the “back channel” [2005]

- Geo-temporal breadcrumbs in the physical world
  - Serendipitous information discovery; smart gadgets for everyday tasks
Two central tenets of social computing
People

- Motivating participation
- Maintain existing connections
- Suggest new connections
- Derive utility from connections
- Manage diversity of connections
- Efficient communication modes
- Manage privacy, identity
- Cohorts, communities, groups
Two central tenets of social computing

Just helping you pick out some clothes!
Content

- Constantly streaming source of information
- Noise and quality
- Credibility
- Relevance/significance
- Serendipity/freshness
- Summarization/aggregation
- Spam
- Troll, malicious behavior
Looking at some examples through these tenets (Yelp)
Looking at some examples through these tenets (Wikipedia)
Looking at some examples through these tenets (Facebook)
Looking at some examples through these tenets (reddit)
However, over time many challenges of social computing systems were raised:

- Extensive online involvement took people away from interaction with household and community members.
- Some “newbies” became more depressed, alienated, and isolated during the first 6 months of computer use.
Wellman posed in 1999: “Perhaps there are differences in the kinds of communication that take place on the Internet or by telephone or face-to-face.” In the context of today’s social networks, cite some examples of how we use them for distinct purposes compared to offline means.