CS 6474/CS4803
Social Computing: Background

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Two central tenets of social computing

People
Two central tenets of social computing:

Content

Just helping you pick out some clothes!
"As We May Think" predicted (to some extent) many kinds of technology invented after its publication, including hypertext, personal computers, the Internet, the World Wide Web, speech recognition, and online encyclopedias such as Wikipedia: "Wholly new forms of encyclopedias will appear, ready-made with a mesh of associative trails running through them, ready to be dropped into the memex and there amplified."
ARPANET and groupware
IRCs and forums were early “social”

- IRC – Internet Relay Chat, very early rudimentary application layer protocol that supported text based message exchange
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
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.
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=IsVZxanrL7s

Full video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEwo-_pQCz8
Discussion Point 1

How is an understanding of street behavior relevant to the study of behaviors on social computing systems?
Discussion Point 2

What are your key observations (find two) and how do they relate to social computing systems?
Observation 1: People gathered and conversed in the most unexpected (crowded) places
Observation 2: People love to gossip and talk about mundane topics; they gathered in specific places and had conversations that were fairly brief or fairly long.
Observation 3: Conversations had silence and people used reciprocal gestures and movement; streets were a congenial place for expression of these activities
Observation 4: Cities across the world are distinct, but on the streets people acted more or less the same despite underlying contrasts in cultures and practices.
Observation 6: Large cities vs. small cities – differences exist in terms of density, pace, nature and types of social activities. But similarities outweigh differences.
Summary: Urban design needs to account for creating physical places that facilitate civic engagement and community interaction