Blogs and community: launching a new paradigm for online community?

Abstract

Online community has been an important part of the Internet, mainly forming around email lists, bulletin boards and forums. In recent years, the ascendancy of blogs has introduced a new platform for communities. This article looks at some of the emerging patterns of blog based communities and raises some questions for their strategic application.

Introduction

Until recently, the term 'online community' implied a community who interacted online within some bounded set of technologies. In the early years, bulletin board systems (BBSs) and forums (also known as discussion boards) joined email lists as tools that enabled a defined set of people to interact around some shared purpose, over time. These were usually clearly bounded communities. The boundaries were created by the tools themselves – usernames, passwords, registrations or joining of a list. The technological act of joining was the most visible indicator of being 'in' or 'out' of the community. Communities could be public or private and visible only to those who joined.

Many of us interested in the application of online community to learning and work, 'grew up' in this era of bounded communities. We often brought with us our assumptions that online conversation, a core to our learning and work, would naturally happen in forums or email. We happily played with wikis as shared writing or repository spaces. We adopted blogs as personal publishing platforms, but community always found its infrastructural roots in forums and email lists, tools that many of us felt defined online conversation.

Then blog adoption accelerated. People began to blog in specific niches, from gaming, to politics, to third grade classroom curriculum, to chocolate; ecosystems of people writing about things they cared about. They started finding each other, commenting on each others' blogs. RSS (Really Simple Syndication) and feedreaders began to offer new possibilities about how we discovered and read blog posts. Other Web 2.0 tools such as tagging and mashups created ways to aggregate and remix the individual offerings into a unique package, customised by each of us to our own preferences.

The game had changed. And with it changed some of our assumptions about what online community looks like, how individual and collective identity, power and control show up in these communities, and, at the core, the balance between the individual and the group. I have seen rifts between those who prefer one tool over the other. LeFever (2003 & 2004) discussed the blurring of lines between blogs and forum software and the differences between the two; Levine (2005) talked about the importance of discoverability and how this often happens better outside of forums; Warlick (2005) cited four reasons blogs may be better collaborative environments; Owyang (2005) wrote on which tool is better for communities. These bloggers, and others, continue to wrestle with this question. In part, preference and familiarity play a role. But there are differences between the tools as we know them today. In addition, our imagination in applying those tools leads to new options every day. These are all signs of evolution; innovation, clinging to the familiar, rejection and adoption.

Why should we care about how blogs and related tools might engender and support community? How can we strategically use what we know to best deploy blogs in this way? That's the path of exploration for this article. I'm not fully there yet, so I invite you to think with me about developing a strategic lens for looking at blog based communities. We'll start by looking at three forms of blog based communities, then examine the implications and finally suggest how these provide a strategic lens for thinking about online communities.

What blog based communities look like today

As blogging has gained wider adoption, blog based community shows up in three main patterns with a wide variety of hybrid forms emerging between the three. The Single Blog/Blogger Centric Community, the Central Connecting Topic Community and the Boundaried Community.
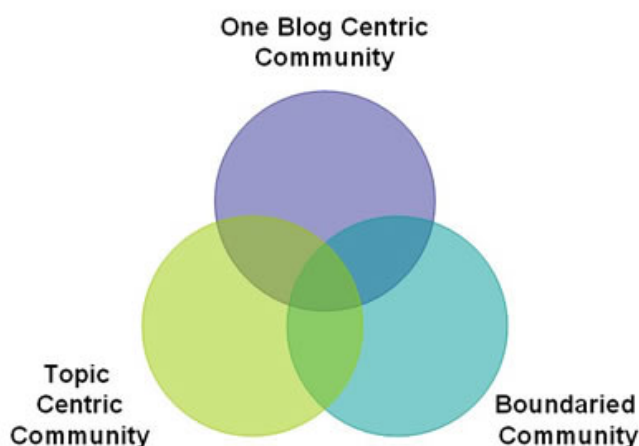

Figure 1: Blog Based Communities

By looking at the patterns we can start thinking about strategic approaches to blogs as a medium for community development. We can look at them in terms of their:
technology/design - the impact of how the blogging tools are deployed and their impact on the community
social architecture - locus of control and power, identity and interaction processes
the role of content or subject matter and
other issues such as scalability and lifecycle.

Single Blog/Blogger Centric Community

The first and most visible model is the hub and spoke model of 'one blog/blogger'.
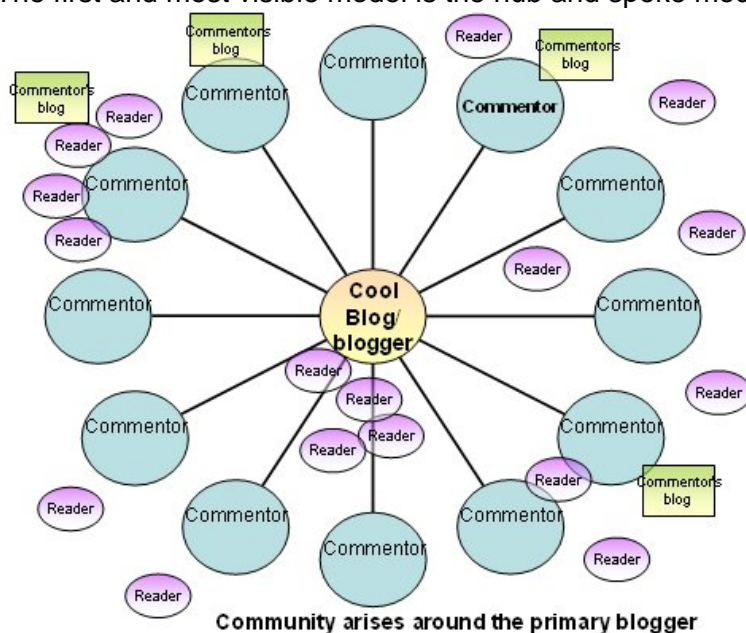

Community arises around the primary blogger

Figure 2: Single Blog/Blogger Centric Community

This is the first form of blog based community to emerge as readers begin returning to early bloggers' sites, commenting and getting to know not only the blogger, but the community of commentors. The one blog is owned by one owner or organisation. There may be more than one blogger writing in a blog, but this is not an aggregation of blogs. It is best exemplified by well known or 'A List' bloggers, but has expanded to key bloggers in particular fields such as Stephen Downes or *The Knowledge Tree,* in e-learning,

Stephen Downes

The Knowledge Tree

or blogs run by an organisation such as Interplast or Anecdote. Some of these have multiple authors, but they are all in one blog.

Technologically, these communities rest on one blogging platform and a single blog. The features of that platform and blog represent the range of features available to the community. There is little opportunity for members to change, add to or adapt the environment. More blogging tools make it easy to have multiuser blogs such as WordPress, Blogger and Typepad.

The central identities of these communities are the blog owners. Their identities are the best known in the community. The commentors' identities might emerge over time, but more likely, as commentors get to know each other, they share their personal details via private email, instant messaging and other forms of 'backchannel'. David Wilcox of Designing for Civil Society notes that '...blogs are personally defined spaces', (D.Wilcox, 2006, pers. comm., 26 August) which suggests that blogs allow us to get to know people better, providing a substrate for relationship and trust. This is quite different to a traditional online community where purpose brings people together and relationship and identity unfold over time, within the context of that purpose and not through a focus on an individual.

The power in this community is firmly in the central blogger's control. If he/she were to take down his/her blog, the community would most likely shatter unless the members had formed alternate communication paths to each other. The blog owner can set the rules and norms of engagement. There is no expectation of democracy, although when bloggers close or remove comments, cries of 'censorship' still ring out. But there is no obligation on the blogger to either provide the option for comments, nor to allow all comments. That said, when comments are restricted or not allowed, there can be no visible manifestation of community on the site.
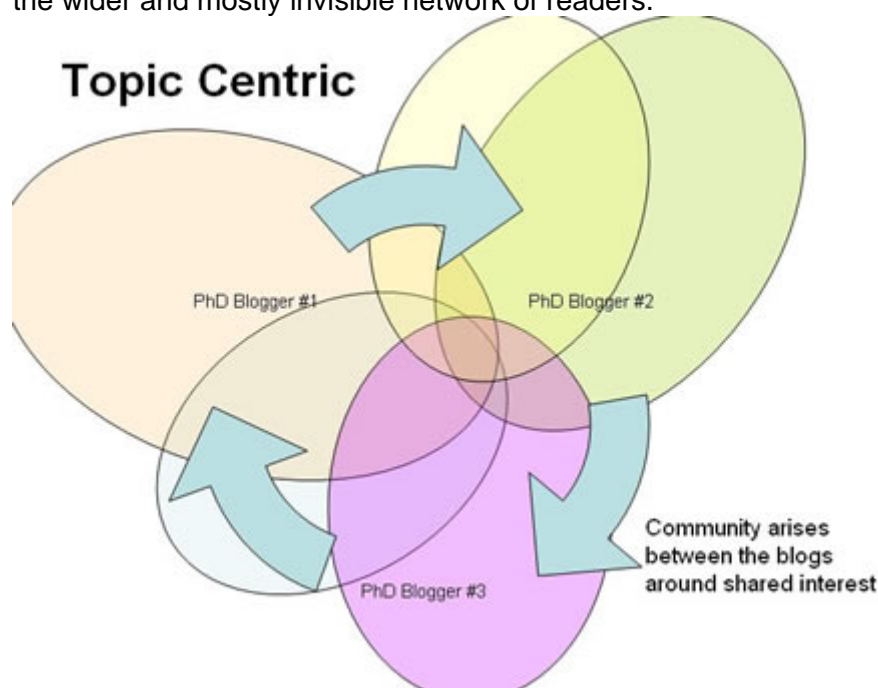
From a subject matter perspective, single blog centric communities are almost broadcast-like, with the central blogger setting the conversational topic. Commentors can respond, or go away, but unless they develop an influential relationship with the central blogger, they can't control the topic.

What is interesting is how the community grows and develops over time. The volume of comments on a blog post may become overwhelming. It is unclear how far out these sites

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can scale from a community perspective, and they may become less community-like over time. Key commentors attracting their own set of readers in comments may be moved to create their own blogs. Or they may attract members to their existing blogs. Other commentors may add these other blogs to their daily reading, or shift entirely to the new blog. Links between the spin off blogs may show up in blogrolls, keeping a loose tie to the original blog, and forming a Central Connecting Topic Community, the second form.

Central Connecting Topic Community

Instead of a hub and spoke, the Central Connecting Topic Centric blog community is a network formation. This form is a community that arises between blogs linked by a common passion or topic. The boundary of the network is a combination of subject matter (domain) and membership (community). Beyond the visible membership of linked blogs is the wider and mostly invisible network of readers.

Figure 3: Topic Centric Community

This form is exemplified by groups such as food bloggers, mummy bloggers, travel bloggers and political bloggers with a particular party or issue identification. They are often second wave adopters who would be hard pressed to attract the large numbers of readers as the early 'A list' bloggers did. They may be far less interested in positioning themselves, as they are in the topic they blog about. As these grow, they are more network like than community like. Communities form within the network as people find more specific niches and interests.

In topic centric communities both power and identity is distributed across the community. The existence of the community does not rise or fall on one blog. It can scale out and form subcommunities easily. Identity is manifest through the relevance, quality or amount of enjoyment a post provides to others. Personal details are not always disclosed on the blogs, but may be shared via private email and instant messaging. The rich network of perspectives allows the readers many views on an issue, rather than one that you might see in a blog centric community.

There has been some interesting work trying to describe how the articulation of norms helps define a blog based community made up of separate blogs (Wei 2005). Suarez

(2006) tried to formalise a network of people who blogged about knowledge management by establishing a mailing list and a wiki to support the intersection of the community members.

Topic centric communities have no single technological platform, with each blogger selecting their own tool. What links them is hyperlinks, in the form of blogrolls, links to other blogs within blog posts, tagging, aggregated feeds (using RSS), trackbacks and comments. Some of these networks have been formalised, such as with blog rings, which share many characteristics with Boundaried Blog Communities. Blog rings are groups of blogs that have self identified as having a shared topic and then are linked with a piece of code that links one blog to the next in the 'ring'. Thus you can start in one blog, but go from related blog to related blog simply by clicking on the blogring link. With the advent of blogrolls, the blogring may be less relevant than in the past, but blogrings usually have specific guidelines about how to, and who can, participate. Blogrolls, on the other hand, are individually driven links, outward, to blogs that a blogger favors, creating a much more 'ad hoc' way of linking to related blogs. Blogroll links are not always reciprocal.

It is interesting that other technologies are supporting the formation of these topic centric communities. Having a shared tag, a key word that bloggers can attach to their individual posts, can mark a post as relevant to a community, moving down to a finer grained level of association. So a blogger who blogs about many topics can help people find just what they want to find using tags. Tools that aggregate posts from blogs or even tagged posts can blur the boundaries of each individual blog, creating what appears to be a unified collection of posts, assembled on the fly as individual bloggers add posts. Groups may maintain a shared wiki or email list as an adjunct to keep information organized or communicate informally.
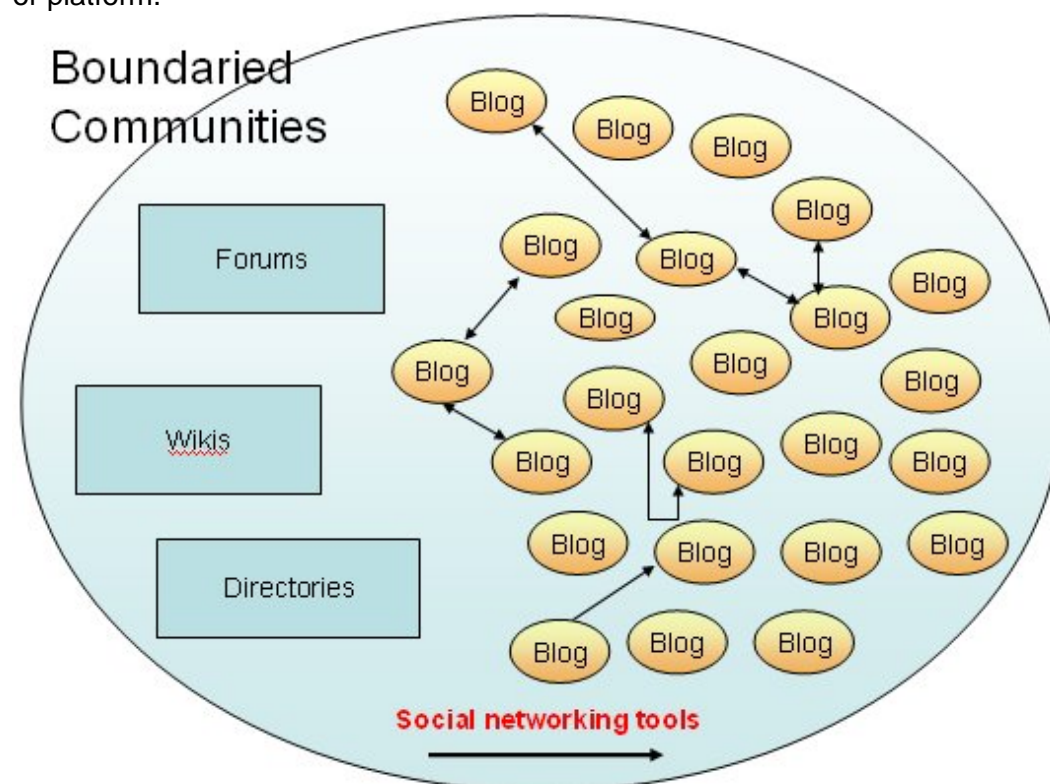
Some researchers (Anjewierden 2005, Vande Moere 2006) have been using tools to analyse post contents and interlinking structures between blogs to help visualise blog communities. This is significant, because many bloggers don't realise the reach of their blogs or how their blogs fit into a larger network. I personally found my blog over time helped me to see connections to my network that I did not know existed prior. But it is hard to see that network all at once. I sense that when we can visualise our communities more easily, they have more impact in our lives.

An example of a community that decided to use technology to create an experience of a shared community is the Global Voices community, which aggregates blogs from developing countries in an effort to get the mainstream media to pay attention to issues in those countries.

The individuals still have and maintain their own blogs, but they also have biographies on the main Global Voices site, formalising identity in a new way. The members support each other in terms of improving their practice, advocacy when a blogger is threatened and generally learning from each other. This then becomes a bit more like the third form, the Boundaried Community.

Boundaried Communities

Boundaried communities are collections of blogs and blog readers hosted on a single site or platform.

Figure 4: Boundaried Communities

Typically members register and 'join' the community and are offered the chance to create a blog. This boundary makes them the closest form to traditional forum based communities. Examples include the huge teen oriented site, MySpace.com, Yahoo 360, March of Dimes, Share Your Story, and Farmer's (2006) Australian free educational blogging sites Edublogs, ESLblogs, Uniblogs and Learnerblogs.

Often these communities have other tools such as discussion boards, social networking features, wikis and instant messaging built in. The blogs are part of the overall ecosystem. There is less emphasis on RSS and cross linking because those features are built into the technology in other ways. Because they are within a defined boundary, bloggers can see and easily access other blogs. They can, if they wish, link but mostly within this closed system and they seem to link less often outside of the community. This leads to denser and faster possible internal connections, possibly community building.

[Share Your Story,](#) a site for parents with babies in neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) started out as a discussion board based community and added blogs in July of 2005. Contrary to some worries about adoption of blogging, and blogging tools by what could be seen as a technological 'second wave' adopter group, blogs were rapidly adopted as a way of offering one's personal voice within the overall community. Blogs did not replace the forums. They offered a new community activity. The blogger has more control of the message than in a discussion board. They control the pacing by their own frequency of posting. The blogs are their more personal part of the site with pictures and reflections, whereas the discussions are the centre of information exchange and daily 'chit chat'.

Power in boundaried communities is held in part by the 'owner' of the platform who can impose rules on the community, but power is exercised by bloggers in three typical ways. The first is frequency of posting. The blogger can decide when to post. In some communities, frequent posting puts a person's blog higher in the list of blogs, which may promote frequent blogging. The second is popularity or interest as measured by how many comments a blogger gets. As a blogger gets to be known in a community, more people comment. That blogger gains stature. Finally, the third is when there are social networking tools associated with the blog that help visualise relationship. These are often tools which allow you to add people as 'friends' or have them in your 'neighbourhood'. This then makes their blog posts more visible on your blog and convey a sense of 'who likes or is associated with whom'. A classic example of this is [MySpace](#) where users can define who can see what on their spaces, indicate who is a friend and in general show or not show one's social network within the overall MySpace ecosystem.

Often there is more emphasis on the social connections and social networking, as evidenced by attention on who is commenting on whose blog. Where there are social networking tools built in, the ease of adding someone to your network, as displayed in your blog, leads to easy formation of groups within the larger environment, suggesting that many of these sites are networks containing communities.

Some of these sites have a central content or domain direction and people are given particular expectations about what they should blog about, frequency, etc. such as [Blogswana](#). Others, like [Edublogs](#), offer a specific set of terms of use, identify what is not allowed, and the rest is up to the participants. Content can be focused or all over the place.

Hybrids and Emerging Forms

The three forms noted above are really only the start. People are creative, and they will adapt and invent new uses. Blog mentoring communities are an example, where part of the manifestation of the community shows up in the blog, but other offline activity is a central manifestation of the community. 'Live blogging' communities tie face to face with the online for a time 'delimited' community, a community that manifests only for a short period of time associated with the live event.

New tools which allow a person to 'carry' their identity across a variety of online platforms and create their own personal networks suggest that our static ideas of blogs, wikis and forums will be outdated by the idea of a personal network and information cloud, that we shape and which is shaped by those we include in our network. This suggests we are redefining community.

So, what do we mean by community?

In my home town of Seattle there is a neighborhood called Fremont. It has traditionally been the home of artists, liberal thinkers and a great deal of creativity. Close to the neighbourhood centre there was a desolate area underneath a major bridge that attracted nothing but problems. Instead of complaining about the limitations of this spot, the creative people in Fremont transformed it by making a giant cement Troll under the bridge.

It did not matter that this was not prime real estate. It was in the community, so they made the most of it. The Troll is for me a visible symbol of the heart, art and sensibility of the community. They took a bare patch of land and made it magical. That's community. Online we also stake a patch of territory and make it ours. Regardless of what it looks like. So my caution to all of us is to never ever mistake the platform for the community. It is what people do with each other using the tools that matters.

Many have written about the definitions of online community (White 2005). The key indicator for us is that community is present when individual and collective identity begins to be expressed; when we care about who said what, not just the what; when relationship

is part of the dynamic and links are no longer the only currency of exchange (Packwood 2005).

So how might these things show up in blog based community? How would they vary across the three forms?

- Shared readership?
- Shared authorship?
- Shared competency or domain knowledge?
- Individual and/or shared identity?
- Relationship between the core and periphery?
- How boundaries show up?
- How power is manifest?
- How learning is reflected from the individual (blogs) back to the community?

It is interesting using these questions because blog communities show up slightly differently than forum based communities. Boundaries show up differently and more permeably. Identity and power varies considerably depending on the blog community structure. What is similar is the flow of learning back to the community. People who blog share what they know. Others add in their contributions via comments. This echoes similar positive behaviours seen in successful forum based communities. So there is something about the underlying *community* ethic that bridges blog and forum based communities in most of the types of communities I've worked with or observed. These have almost exclusively been very topic or purpose driven, and rarely commercial. So I can't generalise out to commercial sites.

...or do we mean network?

Because most blog communities are not bounded by a technological wall and have very permeable boundaries, they can grow far beyond the ability of a single individual to keep track of his or her network. They can change within days if a key blog becomes highly referenced in the blogosphere, totally changing the community dynamics. So are these communities, or are they a collection of nodes in a network, where some are more tightly related into communities? And if so, how might this be a design benefit?

Mendizabal (2006) has suggested that there are six functions that are played by a network. If we look at these six functions, we have another frame to analyse blog communities. They are:

- filters
- amplifyers
- convenors
- facilitators
- investors and
- community builders.

For example, people who tag their articles help others filter for specific content. People who point to key posts and resources amplify the work of others. Those who create a conducive environment for commenting, who organise blog events such as Blog Carnivals and web/blog rings are convenors. (A blog carnival is an organised effort to collect blog posts around a certain topic and post them on a host blog. Bloggers share the duty of organising these, usually picking one day a week or month to aggregate the posts.)

The facilitator role is a bit less obvious until people get angry and usually someone will step in to mediate. This is different from many forum and list based communities where the facilitator or moderator is a key role and identity. Investors are the providers of blogging

software and hosting services, people who write bits of code that allow increased functionality, particularly tools that make it easier to track comment-based conversations (Convo, Co-Comment) and other goodies. Finally, in a sense, anyone who points to another blogger with a link, who invites comments, who responds to comments, is a potential community builder.

I've found this a useful way to assess what is going on in any community or network. It is useful to identify missing roles or nudge some energy from one role to another as a community building activity and could be a strategy for supporting blog based communities.

Mendizabal's (2006) six functions echo some of the work Cross and Parker (2004) who describe types within a social network, i.e. Central Connectors, Unsung Heroes, Bottlenecks, Boundary Spanners and Peripheral People.

'Central Connectors' are people with dense sets of connections. We could think about the blogger in a single blog community as a central connector. 'Unsung Heroes' are people who '...engage selflessly in various aspects of their work and support the groups in ways that often go unrecognized' (Cross & Parker 2004:71). In any of the three forms of blog based community, this might be the person who uses back channel email to point out a blog post, stimulate productive conversations in comments or take the time to read carefully and respond thoughtfully to a post.

'The Bottleneck' is the person who has '...become so central to a network that they end up holding the group back' (Cross & Parker 2004:73). This could again be the blogger in a blog centric community who doesn't respond to comments, takes unexpected breaks from blogging, or who shuts down comments without warning. This may be from intent or just the circumstance of growing so popular. In Boundaried Communities, this may be the community host who can't get around to solving a technical problem, or who starts moderating and removing posts without clarity or adherence to the community rules. 'Boundary Spanners' are those who find the connections between people and ideas.

Again, this role can be seen in all three forms, but particularly in a blogger in any form who is generous in finding related blogs and linking to them, sometimes called 'linky love'. 'Information Brokers' are the people who notice and activate indirect connections. It is less clear to me how these show up in blog networks, since hyperlinks afford fairly direct connections.

Finally, there are the 'Peripheral People'. These make up a very important and often overlooked component of all three of these communities. We might rename them 'readers'. These are people who read, but don't blog themselves. They rarely if at all comment. But they represent a powerful part of any community. In forum based communities, we used to call these people lurkers. In the world of blogs, they have gained a new legitimacy because readers are expected with blogs. There is no way we could provide enough attention to comments if every reader commented. Yet the posts created in a blog community touch readers. They stimulate them to action. They provide catalysts for learning. Not every person has to interact, by commenting, to gain value. However, that value may show up differently for different bloggers.

Bloggers who are concerned with popularity and the number of hits they get will blog to attract readers. They will write in styles and with content that captures attention which may or may not nurture relationship. Bloggers who are concerned about community may create posts that have more 'insider language' which may be less attractive to casual readers from the outside. This may be a pattern to explore in topic and community centric communities.

A lens for using blogs for community

With the perspective of technology/design, social architecture (including roles and forms of interaction), the role of content or subject matter, and other issues such as scalability and lifecycle, how can we use this view of blog community forms as a strategic lens for designing and nurturing communities?

First, it is helpful to get a glance about where the forms are similar or different. By looking across them at the technological and social architectures and how they accommodate topic or domain, we can see a few patterns. (I encourage you to add to this in the comments - 'cos I can't figure this out alone!)

Technological Architecture

Single Blog Centric	Topic Centric	Boundaried
Technology platform		
Uses a single tool	Blogs can be on a variety of tools, each controlled & customised individually	Platform centrally hosted and controlled
Tool controlled by blog owner	No centralized tool conventions	Members may have some level of customization options
Community members have little/no control on platform	May use webring link conventions as an ad hoc shared technology Network will not fall with the failure of one blog	Site administrator ultimately can control/delete blogs
Technological Boundaries		
Clear central boundary around blogger	Few clear boundaries	Clear boundaries as defined by registration and log–in
Larger network unbounded	Webrings offer some sense of boundary	Varied use of RSS and tags
Connect to world and larger network with tags, RSS	Aggregators offer some sense of boundary	May allow non registrants to view, but rarely can they post or comment
	Connect to community, network with tags, RSS	
Scalability		
Comments may grow beyond an easy to read volume	Highly scalable, but intimacy and community closeness may diminish with size	Can scale if platform is robust
Comment spam may be a problem on more popular blogs, making commenting less desirable for members	Focus may blur and subdivide with growth	Can subdivide

The table titled Technological Architecture outlines the differences between single blog centric, topic related and boundaried communities in terms of technology platform, technological boundaries and scalability.

The main difference between the three forms from a technology perspective is that blog centric and boundaried communities all sit on a single platform. So if unified technology is important to your community, these might be preferred modes, since a topic centric community has no central mechanism except personal agreement to have a unified

platform. If you want to distribute control and not have a centralised architecture, the topic centric model offers flexibility and avoids reliance on a single platform in the case of technological failure. So control and simplicity are some of the tensions in the technology architecture variables.

Scalability appears to be most problematic in the single blogger centric community. Although the readership of such a community can scale out, the subset of people who can participate by commenting may have a limit, both for the blogger to read/control and for the reader to wade through.

Social Architecture

Single Blog Centric	Topic Centric	Boundaried
Power		
Blog owner holds most of the power	Power distributed across all the blogs	Some community leaders may have more influence
Commentors can disrupt if they choose to		Site owner wields ultimate power
Identity		
Blog owner primary identity	Each blogger has unique identity	Each blogger has unique identity
Frequent/valued commentors may build up identity	Some bloggers may have more prominence/popularity than others (community leaders)	Identity extended through participation in other areas/tools (forums, social networking, etc.)
Interaction Modes		
Blogger to reader	Blogger to reader	Blogger to reader
Commentors to blogger	Blogger to blogger	Blogger to blogger
Commentors to commentors	Commentors to blogger	Commentors to blogger
Linking to/from other blogs	Commentors to commenters	Commentors to commentors
Back channel	Linking to/from other blogs	Linking to/from other blogs
Call and response may dominate over dialog	Back channel	Using other site tools (IM, forums, wikis, social networking tools, etc.)
		Back channel

The table titled Social Architecture outlines the differences between single blog centric, topic related and boundaried communities in terms of power, identity and interaction modes.

In the social architecture, we see the most signficant set of differences around the issues of control/power and identity. This is a classic expression of the tension between the individual and the group that shows up in all social formations. From a design perspective, how might we intend the balance between indivdiual and group to show up? If we want an individual focus, blogs give some of that in all forms, but has primacy in the blog centric formation.

Interestingly, all three offer a range of interaction options, although the power dynamics changes with the relationships in those dynamics. For example, while anyone potentially could comment in any three forms, the blog centric blogger could most easily prevent that interaction within the community. Power is key here. The topic centric community has the most distributed power. The boundaried community power distribution ultimately depends

on the choices of the site administrator. In the single blog centric power clearly sits at the centre, as does identity.

Content Domain

Single Blog Centric	Topic Centric	Boundaried
Findability		
Archives	Search across blog archives	Search within online space
Tagging		
Focus/Purpose		
Driven by blog owner	Blogs may contain domain related material AND other material. Focus on domain strengthened with tagging and categories	

The table titled Content Domain outlines the differences between single blog centric, topic related and boundaried communities in terms of findability and purpose focus.

Finally, in the content or domain area, power again raises its head. While topic theoretically can be quite focused or wide ranging, the control of the single blogger can trump the options. Topic centric is again the most flexible, but boundaried communities can or may not be flexible, depending on the site rules. However, boundaried communities offer the chance to be 'a little of both' when they set a general topic, but allow members to subdivide and even expand the topic focus.

With blogger centric communities, there is a question of what attracts community members, the blogger's personality, or the topic. Blog researcher Lilia Efimova (2006) suggests ...'[t]he communities formed around an author-centred blog are likely to depend more on the connections of blog-readers with the blogger personality than the topics she covers' (2006:para.10).

If you want the topic focus to be emergent and flexible, don't rely on a single blogger community unless that single blogger chooses to be open and emergent and responsive to the community participants. If you want a clear focus, like *The Knowledge Tree*, stick to the single blog form.

Conclusion

If you click on the del.icio.us tag '[blog_communities](#)' it quickly becomes clear that this is a topic that many are thinking about and working on. In doing research for this article, I asked my network for their sources via a blog post and in 24 hours I had more than I could ever hope to scan and still have a chance of finishing this article. It is a rich vein, with much to mine.

Some of the exciting areas of exploration are from a structural perspective, looking at blog community formation patterns through the exploration of links between blogs and comment patterns over time. Another area is the exploration of blog communities within particular domains, with some great work being done in the education and business communities.
How do these lenses work when we look across different genres (edublogging, workteam blogging, customer support blogging)? The non profit and non government sector is awakening to the possibility of blog communities for many aspects of its work.

Technological developments that allow us, as members, to see our blog communities such as Blogmapping and Frapper put the power in our hands. We don't have to wait for someone to do the research. Tools make us experts as well.

And finally, what are the other questions that emerge from this way of looking at blog based communities? What surprises await us as we observe and learn more? What happens when our options for community membership overwhelm us? When we fully see both the positive and destructive power of these communities? What happens when we move beyond text?

Community is alive and well in the blogosphere. It is emerging in a variety of patterns and manifesting in all sizes and types of communities. By beginning to explore their shape and interaction patterns, we can begin to think about how to intentionally nurture blog based communities for specific purposes. Much like the lessons for forum based communities which emerged in the late 1990s, we are now discovering what works, why, and what might happen next. It is still new. The patterns are not stable. But they suggest ways to think about the role of technology, power, identity and content in designing online communities.

Like the artist community in Fremont with their Troll, when a community sees a gap or an opportunity, they join together to fill it. So this exploration of the form and function of blog based communities is just beginning. We see a new tool, and we begin the creative process. The canvas is up, the paints are in front of us. The next step echoes Howard Rheingold's famous email tag line '...what it is ---> is up to us' (H. Rheingold, 1997, pers. comm., 28 April). As the godfather of online communities, (he coined the term 'virtual community'), Rheingold puts his finger on the pulse of possibility, yet again.

Let's continue this conversation in our live online 'gathering' on 25 (US) or 26 (AUS) September, as we hop across time zones to converse together.

Nancy's Web 2.0 Glossary - (For detailed version see Useful Links below)

back channel - communication (email, instant message) sent personally to one or more individuals as opposed to a public conferencing forum. Back channel is rarely documented, but has a big impact in online interactions

blog roll – 'A list of recommended sites that appears in the sidebar of a blog. These sites are typically sites that are either on similar topics, sites that the blogger reads regularly, or sites that belong to the blogger's friends or colleagues. The term "blogroll" also evokes the concept of political logrolling (when legislators promise to vote for one another's pet bills) -- which is not unlike bloggers' habit of reciprocating links by posting links to blogs that link back to their own blogs.' – Social Signal

mashups - 'Website or Web 2.0 application that uses content from more than one source to create a completely new service.' Wikipedia

RSS - (Really Simple Syndication) – At it's simplest, a mechanism to allow you to subscribe to updated web content such as blog posts and forum messages. 'The RSS formats provide web content or summaries of web content together with links to the full versions of the content, and other meta-data. This information is delivered as an XML file called an RSS feed, web feed, RSS stream, or RSS channel. In addition to facilitating syndication, RSS allows a website's frequent readers to track updates on the site using an aggregator.' - Wikipedia

tagging - 'Tags are the keywords people add to articles in their blog or to web pages via social book marking tools like del.icio.us, Technorati, Yahoo ! My Web 2.0, etc.' - Wikipedia

Useful Links

Anecdote http://www.anecdote.com.au/index.php

Australian free educational blogging sites

http://www.edublogs.org/, http://www.eslblogs.org/, http://www.uniblogs.org/ and http://www.learnerblogs.org/

Blog Communities del.icio.us tag http://del.icio.us/tag/blog_communities

Blog Community Visualisation - samples include

http://anjo.blogs.com/metis/2005/01/blogtrace.html

http://anjo.blogs.com/metis/2005/01/visual_settleme.html

http://infosthetics.com/archives/blog/?p=2

http://infosthetics.com/archives/2005/12/weblog_conversation_visualization_diagram.html

Blogmapping http://www.blogmapping.com/

Blogswana - http://blogswana.wordpress.com/about/

Designing for Civil Society: David Wilcox on technology, engagement, governance http://partnerships.typepad.com/civic/

Frapper http://www.frappr.com/

Nancy's Glossary - Full Circle and Associates - http://www.fullcirc.com/weblog/2006/08/updating-my-online-interaction.htm

Global Voices community http://www.globalvoicesonline.org/

Interplast - http://www.interplast.org

KM Bloggers Network

http://www.elsua.net/2006/04/28/welcome-to-the-kmbloggers-community/

MultiUser Blogging Tools

Wordpress http://wordpress.com/, Blogger http://www.blogger.com/ and Typepad http://www.typepad.com/

Share Your Story http://www.shareyourstory.org/

MySpace http://www.myspace.com

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