

Online Communication in the Digital Age
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Lecture – 35
Online Social Support and Social Media

Good morning friends and welcome to this module. In the previous module, we had looked at blogging and microblogging platforms as popular forms of digital communication. Today, in this present module, we shall discuss how digital communication and social media can offer support to individuals and communities during their times of need. Social support refers to the assistance and encouragement we receive from our social networks such as family, friends, peers, and online communities too in today's world. Traditionally, as we know, it has been offline, meeting with a friend, for example, or spending time with family. However, digital communication has made it possible in the online mode also.

It encompasses emotional, informational, extended social networks, and tangible forms of help that sustain us during challenging or stressful situations. On digital platforms, social media serves as a valuable tool for maintaining such connections. Though social media should not be a substitute for face-to-face interactions, yet it has a wider reach as it transcends geographical barriers and can also be reached, understood, and acted upon by total strangers too.

The Power of Social Support in Online Communication

- MacGeorge, Feng, and Burleson (2011) highlight that seeking and providing social support is a crucial aspect of human communication, as individuals rely on it to cope with stress and uncertainty.
- According to Albrecht and Adelman (1987), social support serves the purpose of *reducing uncertainty* about a situation, the self, the other person, or the relationship.
 - This enhances an individual's perception of personal control over their experience.
- Social support encompasses both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication among individuals providing and receiving assistance.



Source: Management Weekly

Several researchers have pointed out that seeking and providing social support is a crucial aspect of human communication as individuals rely on it to cope with stress and uncertainty. Here we have referred to a 1987 work of Albrecht and Adelman who have

suggested that social support serves the purpose of reducing uncertainty about a situation, our own self, the other person, or the relationship. This stands valid in the context of online social media networks, which may offer us social and individual sustenance also. It may be verbal as well as non-verbal depending on the needs and also the preference of the provider. Nowadays, we see that more and more people are approaching online communities through social media to seek support in their times of grief.

- Even though Social support is often interpersonal, more and more people are now seeking social support through computer-mediated communication (CMC) and approaching strangers.
- According to Eastin and LaRose (2005), online tools have become instrumental in connecting individuals with larger networks, thereby enabling them to seek various forms of social support.
- The reason behind this shift is that online groups enable individuals to access more people or people who are better equipped to offer the type of support they require.
- It also provides us with a means of fulfilling the emotional and psychological need for support.



Source: Productivity Guy, (2020, August 3). *What is Social Support | Explained in 2 min* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCZU9NFLw>

Online tools have become instrumental in connecting individuals with larger networks. As early as 2005, Eastin and LaRose have suggested that online tools have become instrumental in connecting individuals with larger networks and thus enabling them to seek various forms of social support. The reason behind this shift from the offline to online groups has enabled the individuals to access more people or people who are better equipped to offer the type of support they require. It also simultaneously provides us with a means of fulfilling the emotional and psychological need for support. The feeling of being supported and connected to others has positive effects on our mental health and overall well-being and therefore social support is a major determinant of health and well-being.

- Social support is an incredibly important topic nowadays because, as it turns out, social support is a major determinant of health and well-being.
 - Numerous studies indicate social support is essential for maintaining physical and psychological health.
- Individuals who spend more time communicating with online support group members are more likely to have a larger online support network and a higher level of support network satisfaction (Wright, 2000a, 2000b).
- Bambina A. remarks that core members, who are most actively engaged in online group communication, provided and received more emotional social support than peripheral members.



Source: Greater Good

Numerous studies support this idea and indicate that social support is essential for maintaining not only physical but also particularly psychological health. Studies have come out which suggest that individuals who spend more time in communicating with online support group members are more likely to have a larger online support network and a higher level of support network satisfaction. Other researchers remark that core members who are most actively engaged in online group communication provided and received better and more emotional social support in comparison to the peripheral members.

- The harmful consequences of poor social support and the protective effects of good social support in mental illness have also been well documented.*
- Social support may moderate genetic and environmental vulnerabilities and confer resilience to stress, possibly via its effects on the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical (HPA) system, the noradrenergic system, and central oxytocin pathways.
- Online available research and specific interventions to increase social support for psychiatrically ill and at-risk populations is helpful in increasing awareness.



Source:
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2921311/>

*Source: Psychiatry, May 2007; " Social Support and Resilience to Stress : From Neurobiology to Clinical Practice, Ozbay, Johnson, Dimoulas, MorganIII, Charney and Southwick

In the context of diseases related with mental illness, the harmful consequences of poor social support have also been well documented. Social support may moderate genetic and environmental vulnerabilities and confer resilience to stress possibly via its effect on the HPA system, the noradrenergic system and the central oxytocin pathways.

Online available research and specific interventions to increase social support for psychiatrically ill and at-risk populations is helpful in increasing awareness. Such studies can provide tangible medical benefits as well as online social support. Additionally, we find that self-disclosure is pervasive on social media. Research proves that it has significant implications for psychological well-being. There is a bi-directional relationship between well-being and self-disclosure on social media.

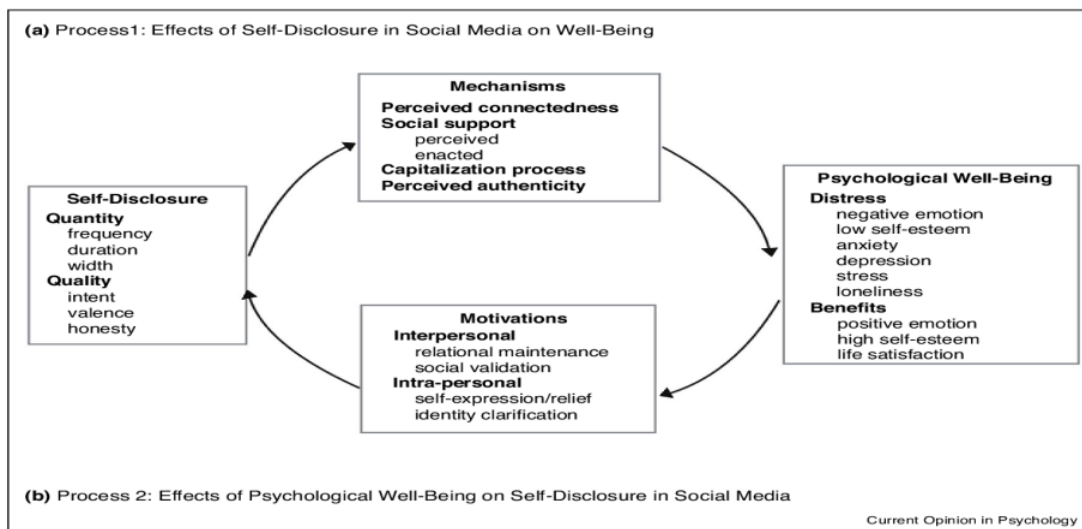
- Mufan Luo and Jeffrey T Hancock, in their 2019 Elsevier research paper “Self-disclosure and social media: motivations, mechanisms and psychological well-being”^{*} comment on it.
- They attempt to synthesize recent research on the motivations, mechanisms and effects of on-line self-disclosure on well-being and propose a framework that highlights the bidirectional relationship between self-disclosure and well-being.
- They point out the mechanisms through which self-disclosure on social media influences well-being.
- They disclose how self-disclosure fulfills particular needs of individuals with different well-being characteristics.



Source: <https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/Jeffrey-T-Hancock-2149121233>

^{*} Source: DOI: [10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.08.019](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.08.019) <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31563107/>

I would refer to a research paper by Luo and Hancock who have tried to synthesize recent researches on the motivations, mechanisms and effects of online self-disclosure on well-being of the people and also propose a framework that highlights the bi-directional relationship between self-disclosure on social media and the idea of one's well-being. They disclose how self-disclosure fulfills particular needs of individuals with different well-being characteristics.



The diagram given on this slide has been taken from this research paper by Luo and Hancock and it indicates to us the relationship which exists between the quantity and quality of self-disclosure on the social media platforms and its relationship with our perceived understanding of well-being. It talks about the perceived connectedness, the social support, capitalization process as well as perceived authenticity. These mechanisms available to us with the help of the social media generate a sense of psychological well-being in us which helps us to avoid the distress and also provides us positive emotion, life satisfaction and a sense of better self-esteem. It leads us to interpersonal and intrapersonal motivations also.

Social media has enhanced positive social perceptions regarding various issues. We can cite how it significantly boosted the visibility of Paralympic athletes and their accomplishments during the 2020 Paralympic Games, commenting and sharing about it across platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram etc. To illustrate it further, we will look at the example of Avani Lekhara, an Indian Paralympic gold medalist who unfortunately met with a life altering car accident in 2012 that left her in a wheelchair. Her journey took a historic turn at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics where she secured a gold medal in the women's 10 metre air rifle standing and a bronze medal in 50 metre rifle 3 positions marking the first time an Indian woman clinched two Paralympic medals.

- Avani's journey took a historic turn at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics, where she secured a gold medal in the women's 10m air rifle standing and a Bronze Medal in 50m rifle 3 positions, marking the first time an Indian woman clinched two Paralympic medals.
- Avani Lekhara's Twitter account (@AvaniLekhara) has received numerous messages of support and admiration from people who have been inspired by her achievements.
 - Avani Lekhara's success has resonated with the differently-abled community, as she has become a symbol of hope and inspiration for them.

"I want to dedicate this Gold medal to all physically and mentally challenged people and tell them that if you believe in yourself, you can achieve everything in the world."



Avani Lekhara's Twitter account has received numerous messages of support and admiration from people who have been inspired by her achievements. Her remarkable achievements were celebrated widely on social media and also became a beacon of inspiration to individuals with special abilities, encouraging others to pursue their aspirations. We would also refer to some other online support groups in this context. They are Super.Human, Better Off With An Ally, #WeThe15. Super.human by channel 4 covers the Paralympic Games in depth and depicts what it takes to be a Paralympian, that means the blood, sweat and tears poured into the dedication of the athletes.

- **Super. Human.** by Channel 4
 - covers the Paralympic Games in-depth, depicts what it takes to be a Paralympian, and the consistent toil that is needed.
- **Better Off With An Ally** by the digital financial services company Ally throws the spotlight on all the people supporting the athlete ecosystem and portrays their contribution to the games.
- The global launch of the decade-long campaign **WeThe15** by Paralympic Games aims to support the 1.2 billion differently-abled people in the world.

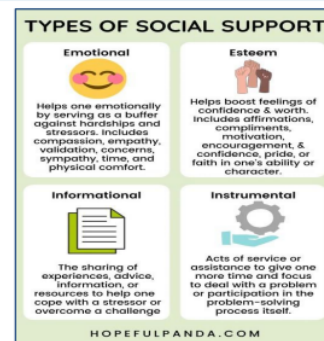


Source: <https://www.dandad.org/awards/professional/2022/235255/superhuman/>

Better Off With An Ally by the digital financial services company Ally throws the spotlight on all the people supporting the athlete ecosystem and portrays their contribution to the Games. The global launch of the decade long campaign #WeThe15 by Paralympic Games aims to support the 1.2 billion differently abled people in the world. This campaign intends to put disability on the inclusion agenda, change people's perception about it and also create online connections to further strengthen different relational ties within the society. Although social media is important for providing access to latent ties and keeping us connected with weak ties, they also can help us communicate and interact with strong ties. And it is these strong ties whether we know them offline or not, which can be a source of social support to us. Now, let us look at the four different types of social support. Though various models for it are available, I refer to the one proposed by Cutrona and Suhr.

Types of Social Support

- Cutrona and Suhr (1992) mention four dimensions of social support: **emotional, esteem, informational, and instrumental** support.
- **Emotional support** refers to expressions of interpersonal caring or emotion, including concern, empathy, and sympathy. It is reported that supportive interactions can have a '*buffering effect*'; that is, they can be protective against the negative consequences of mental health.
- **Esteem support** refers to messages intended to make someone feel better about themselves, including promoting the target's skills, abilities, or sense of self-worth.
 - For example, reminding a friend who failed one exam that she still has the potential and is still going to be successful.



In 1992, Cutrona and Suhr had mentioned four dimensions of social support that is emotional, esteem, informational and instrumental support. The visual on the right-hand side of the slide also illustrates it. Emotional support refers to the expressions of interpersonal caring or emotion. The receiving of such messages creates what is known as a buffering effect. That is, there is a protective layer or a buffer zone against the negative consequences of mental health between us and the traumatic situation we are facing.

Esteem support refers to messages intended to make someone feel better about themselves, including promoting the target's skills, abilities or sense of self-esteem. For example, if somehow a friend has not done very well in the examination, we can support this individual by reminding her that she has a different potential and would definitely be successful later on. Esteem support involves the provision of positive feedback, recognition and affirmation of an individual's abilities.

- **Informational support** refers to the provision of facts or advice.
- It involves providing information, advice, or guidance to help someone solve a problem, make a decision, or learn something new.
 - Examples of providing informational support could include a friend talking about a job opening on LinkedIn, reminding you of an upcoming test, or passing along the name of someone else looking for a roommate.
- Finally, **instrumental support** refers to providing material assistance, often in the form of financial aid or practical assistance..
 - For example, lending money or a textbook to a friend, or help to move a couch, or driving them to the airport.



Source: <https://www.edu.in/jaaher/jaaher-academics/social-support.html>

Informational support refers to the provision of facts or advice. It involves providing information, advice or guidance to help someone solve a problem, make a decision or learn something new. Instrumental support refers to providing material assistance, often in the form of financial aid or practical assistance. For example, lending money or textbook or any other equipment to a person within our circle. All these examples illustrate certain forms of social support that can be readily communicated through digital forms of online media, particularly with the help of the emerging networks which are easily available to us. It has been suggested by Boyd and Ellison and this research was conducted in 2007. Those were the very early days of social media.

Social Media and Social Ties

- **Boyd & Ellison (2007)*** find that Social media has become a significant means of **daily conversations**.
- Also, social media use can reinforce existing social relations by keeping individuals informed of others' activities (Hargittai, 2007).
- This constant stream of information allows individuals to stay connected with friends, family, and acquaintances, even if they are physically distant.



Danah Boyd and N.B. Ellison
Source: wikipedia

*Source: boyd, d.m., & Ellison, N.B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13(1), 210-230. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x/full>

But now we find that the efficacy and validity of this research has sustained even the recent developments of the social media. They had found that the social media becomes a significant means of daily conversations, providing us the phatic alternatives of our offline communication with people. The use of social media can reinforce existing social relations by keeping individuals informed of other people's activities. The constant stream of information allows us to stay connected with friends, family and acquaintances, and even if they are physically distant, we have a feeling of being connected with them. Boyd and Ellison have suggested that social media use can play a positive role in enhancing interpersonal relationships.

Social media can allow unique access to social ties. However, they should not be seen as a substitute for face-to-face interactions or deep meaningful personal connections with individuals.

- Social media has opened up distinctive avenues for accessing social support and introduced innovative ways of offering it.
- Though they may not be the only tools to communicate with some individuals, social media can allow unique access to **social ties**.
- Personal disclosures made on social media, such as through status messages or posts, can create perceptions of intimacy among members of one's social network.
- It also enhances relationships through indirect communication and ambient awareness.



Source: Publiir

Social media has opened up distinctive avenues for accessing social support and has introduced innovative ways of offering it. Personal disclosures made on social media such as through status messages or posts can create perceptions of intimacy among members of one social network, and it definitely enhances relationships through ambient awareness and indirect communication. Social support can also be provided directly via social media from strong ties.

This shift means that emotional closeness no longer relies solely on physical proximity. As a consequence of globalized and mobilized societal and personal networks, strong ties can be really distant in terms of geographical distance. Strong ties are close intimate relationships characterized by emotional bonds and frequent interactions with family and close friends. They have a significant impact on our daily life, decision making and they also provide emotional support at various junctures in our experiences. Weak ties on the other hand are casual relationships with acquaintances and colleagues involving infrequent interactions and lower emotional intensity.

Despite their distant nature, weak ties also offer valuable access to new information, opportunities and diverse perspectives from outside one's immediate social circle.

It is this capability of remote interaction with the help of the social media platforms that exemplifies how technology has facilitated the exchange of support and celebration across geographical distances. The shift towards relying on digital platforms emphasizes the role of social media as an alternative avenue for seeking and receiving social support.

It eliminates the requirement for physical presence and allows individuals to communicate and connect with distant ties. This demonstrates the transformative impact of social media in bridging geographical gaps and facilitating meaningful interactions for social support.

- Social support is often sought and obtained from **strong ties via social media**.
- Since the mid-1980s, internet communities have been utilized to provide social support.
- These communities often facilitate close, deep, and strong personal ties among members, even if they have never met face-to-face, as described by Rheingold in 1993.
- According to Granovetter's (1973) it may not be possible to have a strong bond with someone we have never met.
- However, the hyper-personal model provides a rationale and theoretical support for this phenomenon.



Source: Freshworks

Since the mid-1980s, internet communities have been utilized by people to seek and provide social support, particularly with our strong ties. These early communities also facilitated close, deep and strong personal ties among members, even if they have never met face to face as described by Rheingold in 1993. According to him, it may not be possible to have a strong bond with someone we have never met. However, the hyper personal model available to us with the help of the social media platforms provides rationally and theoretical support for this phenomenon.

In the realm of social networking sites, individuals often turn to their strong ties within their established network, particularly when they have to seek support for any personal situation. As these relationships are the most reliable and offer substantial support. The 2020 research by Kammrath et al. emphasizes the significance of strong ties as both the primary recipients and providers of substantive support within such communities. While strong ties remain crucial for social support, the availability of a diverse network through social media expands the options for seeking the most appropriate support.

- Research conducted by Kammrath et al. (2020) emphasizes the significance of **strong ties** as both the primary recipients and providers of substantive support within SNSs.
- While strong ties remain crucial for social support, the availability of a diverse network through social media expands the options for seeking the most appropriate support.
- In a pair of studies, researchers at the University of Oklahoma looked at how college students sought and received social support via Facebook.
 - Unsurprisingly, **strong ties** were most often sought out for social support, even when using the relatively mass communication channel of a Facebook status message (Johnson et al., 2013).



Source: <https://www.fnu.edu/social-media-primer-for-the-chronically-unhip/>

In a pair of studies, researchers at the University of Oklahoma looked at how college students sought and received social support via Facebook. When students far away from home and family posted a message on Facebook seeking validation or a caring word, they posted a status message visible to their entire Facebook network. But with a specific limited audience in mind, that is their close friends and family. Social support can also be sought and received at the same time from weak ties.

- Granovetter in his research (1973) on job-seeking behavior, found that individuals often obtained employment opportunities through weak ties rather than strong ties.
- **Weak ties**, such as casual acquaintances or distant friends, provided access to a broader network and diverse resources, including job information, referrals, and recommendations.
 - This demonstrates how weak ties can play a significant role in facilitating important outcomes and providing support in specific contexts.
- However, the same study found that social support was received from **strong and weak ties alike** (Rozzell et al., 2014).
- Both close friends and mere acquaintances commented on status updates with supportive messages.



Source: Syros Arqitetura

In researches on job seeking behavior, it has been found that individuals often obtained

employment opportunities through weak ties rather than their strong ties. Weak ties, for example, casual acquaintances or distant friends provided access to a broader network and diverse resources, including information about new jobs, referrals and also recommendations. This demonstrates how weak ties also play a significant role in facilitating important outcomes and providing support in a specific context. However, at the same time, it has also been found interestingly within the same studies that social support was received alike in the same manner from strong as well as weak ties. Both close friends and mere acquaintances commented on status updates with supportive messages. However, it was also noticed that comments from strong ties were perceived as slightly more supportive than comments from weak ties.

Motivations for Information Sharing

- Sanghee Oh and Sue Yeon Syn, in their research article (2015)*, explore the motivations behind social media users sharing personal experiences, information, and social support with anonymous others.
 - A variety of information-sharing activities in social media, including creating postings, photos, and videos in 5 different types of social media: **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Delicious**, **YouTube**, and **Flickr**, were observed.
- The study found that all of these motivations play a role in encouraging information sharing, but the specific motivations differ across different types of social media.



Sanghee Oh and Sue Yeon Syn
Source: LinkedIn

*Source: Oh, S., & Syn, S. Y. (2015). Motivations for sharing information and social support in social media: A comparative analysis of Facebook, Twitter, Delicious, YouTube, and Flickr. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 66(10), 2045-2060.



Sanghee Oh and Sue Yeon Syn in their 2015 research article have explored the motivations behind social media users who share their personal experiences, information and seek social support with anonymous others. A variety of information sharing activities in social media, including creating postings, photos and videos in five different types of major social media were observed by these researchers. And they found that the array of different motivations always plays a role in encouraging information sharing, but the specific motivations differ across different types of social media platforms. Motivations of learning and reciprocity are beneficial in encouraging users with less experience in social media. And at this point, it brings us to the discussion of the role of social media influencers.

- **CauseVox** offers a guide on utilizing social media influencers to drive online fundraising and crowdfunding campaigns.
- In 2010, **Leigh Durst**, a recognized authority in business, operations and digital transformation, coordinated a fundraiser for the Japan earthquake victims during Austin's South by Southwest (SXSW) conference, utilizing the support of social media influencers.
- The outcome was remarkable, with thousands of people nationwide coming together to support Japan, resulting in over \$125,000 raised in online donations within a remarkably short period.



Source:
<https://www.causevox.com/blog/old-new-logs/>



Leigh Durst

Source: <https://twitter.com/leighbjphoto>



Social media influencers are trusted within their communities and therefore, they play a significant role in impacting social support online, spreading awareness, raising funds, etc., during our times of need. In this context, let us refer to CauseVox, which is a fundraising platform, and which helps us for peer-to-peer fundraising, as well as crowdfunding, etc. CauseVox offers a guide on utilizing social media influencers to drive online fundraising and crowdfunding campaigns. This slide describes about how in 2010, leaders, a recognized authority in business operations and digital transformation coordinated a fundraiser for the Japan earthquake victims during Austin's SXSW conference, utilizing the support of social media influencers.

The outcome was remarkable with thousands of people providing financial help to the Japanese people. Some influencers dedicate their efforts to nonprofit causes, working for the betterment of people. Following slides refer to some influencers in this context and discuss in limited details about Beth Kanter, Gail Perry, Amy Neuman and Matt Flannery.



Gail Perry Beth Kanter

Source: LinkedIn

Beth Kanter – @Kanter – 338.5k Twitter followers

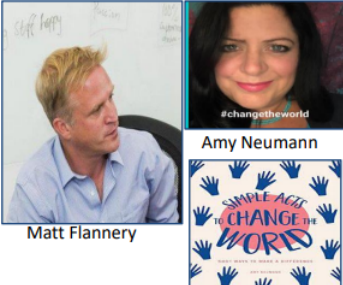
- With three bestselling nonprofit books and over 30 years of experience in the sector, Beth is a well-known influencer.
- She runs the popular nonprofit blog, “Beth’s Blog: How Nonprofits Can Use Social Media”, covering topics such as digital transformation, networks, data, learning, facilitation techniques, and self-care for nonprofit professionals.

Gail Perry – @GailPerrync– 21.7k Twitter followers

- Gail Perry is an international fundraising consultant who works at fundraising campaigns, helping organizations raise hundreds of millions in gifts.
- She is a veteran of over 55 capital campaigns from LA to Maine as a consultant, coach, or staffer – raising over \$500 million.

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Beth Kanter runs the popular nonprofit blog, whereas Gail Perry is an international fundraising consultant.



Matt Flannery Amy Neumann

Amy Neumann – @CharityIdeas – 52.1k Twitter followers

- Amy Neumann is the author of "Simple Acts to Change the World: 500 Ways to Make a Difference." With 25 years of experience, she has collaborated with numerous organizations in nonprofit, B2B, retail, advertising, manufacturing, government, and international sectors.
- In 2017, Amy founded the nonprofit startup Free Tech for Nonprofits, assisting small nonprofits in enhancing their work through smart technology and communication strategy.

Matt Flannery – @mattflannery – 238.8k Twitter followers

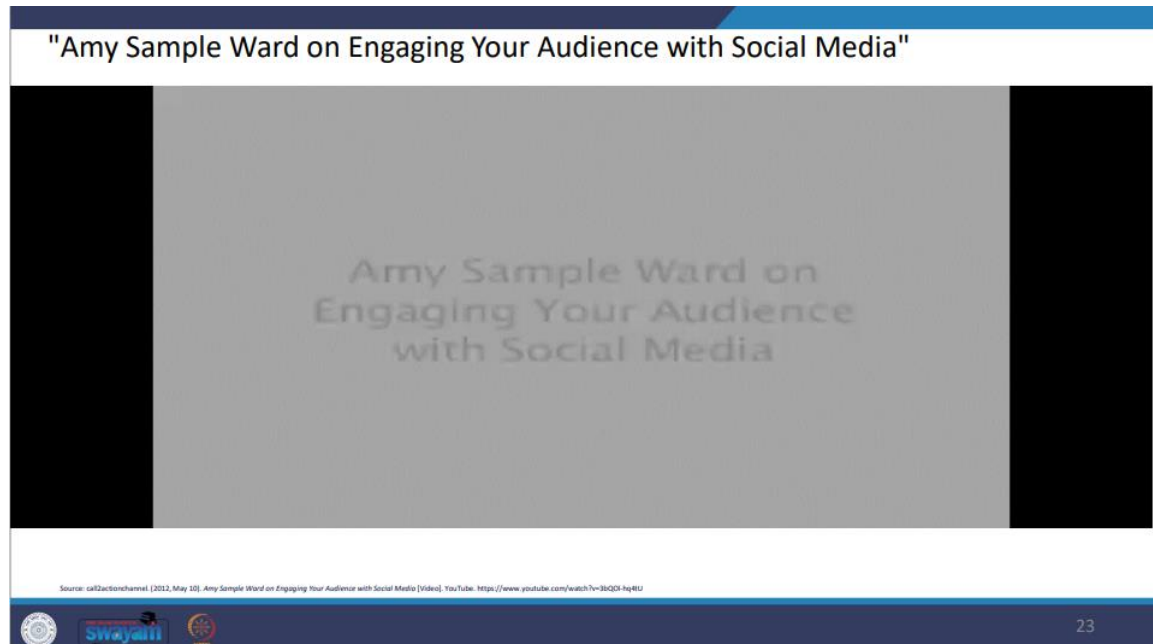
- Matt co-founded Kiva.org and Branch.co, leading Kiva's transformation from a pilot project to a successful online service with global partnerships, lending millions to support low-income entrepreneurs.
- Recognized for his contributions, he received the Skoll Award, became an Ashoka Fellow, and was named one of FORTUNE magazine's "Top 40 under 40" in 2009.

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Amy Neuman provides suggestions for the use of smart technology as well as communication strategies, whereas Matt Flannery has lent support to low-income entrepreneurs with the help of the social media.

In this digital world, change is a constant phenomenon and in this ever-changing digital world with the nature of communication, nature of helping each other has also changed. Community ties are both a product and a cause of role relationships. Let us look at a video of Amy Sample ward, who serves as the CEO of nonprofit technology enterprise network, an

organization which provides training opportunities to strategically use technology to fulfill nonprofit missions and address community needs.




What type of platform or technology are you most excited about that you're paying attention is on your radar right now? What new things are you really enjoying? That's a good question. I don't know. I'm really enjoying not necessarily, you know, one specific tool or one specific platform, but I'm really excited for the growth of tools or solutions that enable organizations to more seamlessly interact across channels so that they aren't just siloed in to Facebook. But if they have a really compelling piece of content or they see a conversation is starting amongst their community, they can help support and facilitate that conversation across different channels. What are good examples of this? Like, what campaign have you seen that did this? Well, one good example that has been talked about here and was very recent, which was Planned Parenthood and Susan G. Komen for the Cure and Planned Parenthood recognized that their supporters were very upset and passionate right away, but across different channels. And so they couldn't just, you know, send out a message that said, well, if funding goes away, give us more funding over and over on all the different channels.

They had to actually, you know, make sure that there was a hashtag or try and find hashtags that were being used on Twitter and engage people there in that message. And then on Facebook, similarly, you know, thank people that just wanted to share that they supported them, but also make sure to provide information as all those different kinds of voices are commenting and saying this is outrageous or I'm so glad they defunded you or somewhere in the middle, you know, and engage with people appropriately within that channel. And then obviously, you know, they have advocacy website versus health service website and make sure there's information there in as soon to real time as possible that

helps people across those different channels and of course, email and mobile and everything else.

Amy has rightly pointed out that we should move across different social media platforms to maximize the chances of sharing information. This will help us in engaging people from different communities outside the regular enclosed social ties. Social scientists, as well as biologists, debate the extent to which relational social structural or personal characteristics impact social behavior.

- **Barry Wellman and Scot Wortley** in their study (1990) draw on the work of community, kinship, social network, and social support analysts to understand the provision of support.
- Six proposed explanations for the interpersonal provision of support are evaluated, including 'emotional aid, small services, large services, financial aid, and companionship'. (Wellman & Wortley, 1990)
- Their research uses quantitative and qualitative data from the second East York study to examine different types of support and characteristics of network members and relationships. It compares the supportiveness of strong and weaker relationships.
- Different types of community ties are likely to provide different kinds of social support, and certain types of ties may be more specialized or broad in resources.



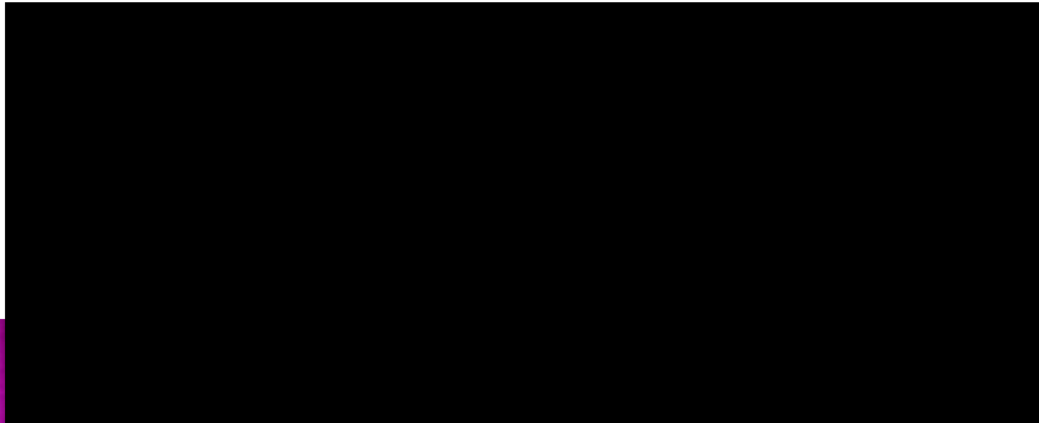
Source: <https://www.crimsl.utoronto.ca/>,
<https://socialmedialab.ca/>

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Barry Wellman and Scott Wortley in their 1990 research had looked at certain explanations for the interpersonal provision of support and they evaluated emotional aid, small services, large services, financial aid and companionship. Using the quantitative and qualitative data, they compared the supportiveness of a strong and weaker relationships. Different types of community ties are likely to provide different kinds of social support and certain types of ties may be more specialized or brought in resources. Their research addresses the question of what factors crucially affect the provision of resources, the characteristics of ties, their social context or the characteristics of network members.

In this context, let us refer to a TED talk by Amanda Palmer, who is an author, musician and blogger. She highlights the deep connections she had formed with her audience through genuine interaction and trust. In other words, like Amy Ward, she also emphasizes on the concept of the 'art of asking'.

The Art of Asking



Source: Goodbooks

TED. (2013, March 1). *The art of asking* | Amanda Palmer [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMJ_P_6H69g



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And meanwhile, I was touring locally and playing in nightclubs with my band, the Dresden Dolls. This is me on piano, a genius drummer. I wrote the songs and eventually we started making enough money that I could quit being a statue. And as we started touring, I really didn't want to lose this sense of direct connection with people because I loved it. So, after all of our shows, we would sign autographs and hug fans and hang out and talk to people. And we made an art out of asking people to help us and join us. And I would track down local musicians and artists and they would set up outside of our shows and they would pass the hat and then they would come in and join us on stage.

So we had this rotating smorgasbord of weird random circus guests. And then Twitter came along and made things even more magic because I could ask instantly for anything, anywhere. So, I would need a piano to practice on and an hour later I would be at a fan's house. This is in London. People would bring home cooked food to us all over the world backstage and feed us and eat with us.

This is in Seattle. Fans who worked in museums and stores and any kind of public space would wave their hands if I would decide to do a last minute spontaneous free gig. This is a library in Auckland. On Saturday, I tweeted for this crate and hat because I did not want to schlep them from the East Coast and they showed up care of this dude, Chris from Newport Beach, who says hello. I once tweeted where in Melbourne can I buy a neti pot and a nurse from a hospital drove one right at that moment to the cafe I was in and I bought her a smoothie and we sat there talking about nursing and death. And I love this kind of random closeness which is lucky because I do a lot of couch surfing.

So I fought my way off my label and for my next project with my new band, the Grand Theft Orchestra, I turned to crowdfunding and I fell into those thousands of connections that I'd

made and I asked my crowd to catch me. And the goal was a hundred thousand dollars. My fans backed me at nearly 1.2 million which was the biggest music crowdfunding project to date.

And you can see how many people it is. It's about 25,000 people. And the media asked, Amanda, the music business is tanking and you encourage piracy. How do you make all these people pay for music? And the real answer is I didn't make them. I asked them.

And through the very act of asking people, I connected with them. And when you connect with them, people want to help you.

In the context of being able to seek help or to be willing to help others, online support can have a positive impact on health efficacy also. Online communities play a significant role in enabling us to provide social support around a variety of health and wellbeing challenges ranging from cancer to diabetes by sharing our personal experiences, the different types of treatments, seeking the advice of the medical professionals.

Health Efficacy and Online Support

- A rich body of work has examined the important role played by online communities in enabling individuals to provide social support around a variety of health and well-being challenges, ranging from cancer to diabetes.
- Online communities have been identified to be powerful platforms where disease-specific guidance and feedback, emotional support, coping and management strategies may be sought.
- In the realm of mental health, a recent meta-analysis indicates that online support is effective in decreasing depression and increasing self-efficacy and quality of life.
 - For instance, one surveyed Facebook users to find that a positive relationship existed between having health concerns and seeking health-related social support.
 - Andalibi et al. studied how individuals with experience of sexual abuse sought support in different online communities on Reddit for emotional wellness.



Source: Freepik

Online communities have been identified to be powerful platforms where disease-specific guidance and feedback is available to us. And a rich body of research work which examines the important role played by online communities in this area exists. In the realm of mental health particularly, a recent meta-analysis indicates that online support is effective in decreasing depression and increasing self-efficacy and quality of life.

Some popular online communities for individuals seeking mental health support are Together All and LiveWorks that offer peer support and resources. Another one, the Dinner Party is a community of people who have experienced significant loss. They host dinner parties where people can connect and share their experiences and also have an online

Conclusion

- Online communities provide a platform for individuals to connect, share experiences, seek advice, and offer support to one another.
- They foster a sense of belonging, reduce isolation, and empower individuals to take action for causes they care about.
- Through fundraising efforts, knowledge sharing, and collaborative initiatives, these communities make a real difference in improving lives and protecting the welfare.



community for those who cannot attend in person.

Online communities thus provide a platform for individuals to connect, share experiences and seek advice and at the same time, they also enable us to offer support to other people, fostering a sense of wellbeing and reducing our isolation in today's fast-paced world.

Through fundraising efforts, knowledge sharing and collaborative initiatives, these communities make a real difference in improving our lives and protecting the welfare.

During this week, we have discussed AI and online communication and have also explored different aspects of social media as a part of today's personal and professional digital communication. We will begin the next week with discussions on social media marketing and the role of social media in entertainment and advertising. Thank you.