Online Community Search

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**Community One**

 When I was four, I was diagnosed with autism. After years of struggles trying to find my voice I found a community of people I connected with who were impacted by a similar diagnosis from a local walk that I attended in New Jersey. Jump almost a decade later I’ve embraced community via my own work as a professional public speaker. What started off as an online Facebook author page (called Kerry Magro) to highlight my own voice which sharing resources to educate others eventually turned into me changing the page into a community page (called A Special Community).

A Special Community started with the idea of reaching an underserved group of people impacted by disability and disease. Now everywhere we go to speak we find a few individuals impacted by a diagnosis and do on-camera interviews with them to highlight their stories with the world while building an even larger “special community.” I’ve done about 100 interviews that are all available to watch here: [www.facebook.com/aspecialcommunity](http://www.facebook.com/aspecialcommunity). What started out with only a few followers is now a community of over 81,000 on Facebook. The main mission/goal of the community now is “To normalize the human condition by educating about individuals with disability & disease.”

The videos since we’ve started have been viewed over 3 Million times and have become an educational resource we spotlight in our presentations whenever we speak at an event. Many members keep the conversation going once a video is produced by commenting and sharing stories of their own. From my knowledge there are no other communities out there that have this wide of a scope as many communities usually only focus on a specific disability and/or disease. Many members of our community even have donated back to our nonprofit (KFM Making A Difference) to give us the opportunity to travel to even more locations around the world to build our community even farther.

Limitations of this community have been organizing content to be easily accessible if a community member was looking for a specific topic (i.e. cerebral palsy). A search engine application to Facebook would help maximize the use of this community as an educational resource for others. Other limitations include personnel to run the community. With more revenue it would be possible to answer more questions from our community that may come up.

These communities, especially in the online communities that have been expanding thanks to advancements in technology, have the impact of making others realize they aren’t alone which was something I felt many a times growing up on the spectrum. Having a community to vent to and listen to others.

**Community Two**

 On the other side of the spectrum there is a private community I’m part of on Facebook called ‘Autism Magic Happy Fun Time’ which title is a joke but has a significant impact on my life today. This community is comprised of columnists, authors, bloggers and other public figures that all create some form of digital and print content about those with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD’s). The community currently has 92 members and whose mission is advancing the conversation of our autism community by supporting one another. On average members post about once a week. Also once a week, a thread is created for all community members to share links to online articles they’ve written during that week to keep track of what everyone has going on.

 While this community is invite only, the link to this community is here: https://www.facebook.com/groups/364399567053656/. Limitations in the past have been that many individuals who are not part of this community have asked to be added but have been denied in the past. Exclusivity has been a significant part of our administrator’s mission for the group.

**Criteria to what constitutes a community**

A community and how it’s defined is one of the more interesting topics I’ve had the opportunity to look at as part of this doctoral program. A huge of that part comes with the evolution of the digital age. Thanks to the internet communities exist around the world versus strictly being tied to a certain location.

In my opinion, no two communities out there today are the same. A community as I mentioned briefly in page one of this paper has the importance of making sure that the members in those communities don’t feel alone. At the same time communities all serve a purpose. Much like life we all have a purpose in it and it’s the same when discussing a community. In a community you are seeking an experience unlike any you can get anywhere else. Self-improvement also plays a pivotal role in community.

 While I’ve seen many communities comprised of large groups of people as long as you have a handful of dedicated participants you can sprout a community fairly quickly. Often I hear families, towns and even states say they are all part of a community. Being from New Jersey, I often hear people refer to those from here being part of the “Garden State Community.”

 Not all people on this planet though are necessarily part of a community. To be part of a community you need to be willing to be a part of it. When you are part of it though it can be a wonderful thing. With life’s successes also come challenges. When those challenges arise whether it be something like autism, disability, disease, poverty, suffering, being part of a community of others who have gone through similar circumstances can be beneficial.

 Community is also not bound by geographic location. Communities have the opportunity to be in person face to face or via some form of an online channel (Face book, Google, Skype, etc). In my examples on page 1 I discuss online communities and some of the strengths and limitations.

 Communities are also not restricted to living beings. A rainforest for example could be compromised of a community of things that tie it together such as lakes, trees, soil, etc.

 Communities however also can come with challenges. Members who bring in different perspectives may clash leading to internal and/or external difficulties. The first word I think about when I hear the word community for some reason is common (i.e. people having things in common). With that in mind you would hope that those common interests would avoid this challenge.

Other challenges include conflicting schedules whether it be in person or maybe even online via community members who live in different time zones. While traveling to Perth, Australia I met a family with a child with autism who are part of an online community who have a pen pal from the U.S. She told me about the stressors of collaborating with a 12-hour time difference.

 In conclusion, a community is what you make it. I believe our Cohort, where we are a family are also a community that will hopefully continue to learn and grow throughout this program.