

## **Blogs as Virtual Communities: Identifying a Sense of Community in the Julie/Julia Project**

### **Comments**

A good case study of a single blog, but I wonder about the value of the survey results. Is this dataset the baseline, or an exception? We can't tell from a single measurement, since there's no context in which to place it.

If survey respondents are 25% more likely to agree that blog X makes them feel like part of a community than they are to make the same statement about blog Y, then such a survey is useful. But the simple statement that X% of respondents said that blog X made them feel like part of a community is only worth so much. There may be other factors as well -- perhaps people who are interested in a cooking blog, or people who find out about a blog via a TV news report, have different definitions of "community" than the readers of other blogs. It's probably safe to assume that a blog with a mostly male readership might require a lower level of activity before its members would say they are part of a "community" -- or, maybe the activity would simply be of a different nature.

The Julie/Julia blog had a particular narrow focus. While it also met other needs that emerged along the way, once the main objective was fulfilled, the blog stopped. A blog that exists for a specific purpose -- to document one woman's progress through a particular book -- shouldn't be judged by the same criteria used to judge open-ended blogs that don't have mission statements that include a final destination. A made-for-TV movie "stops", but a soap opera does not (unless the show is cancelled, of course). They are different genres.

While I'm quibbling about the lack of context, I liked the methodology of this article, though the intense focus on one blog means we don't (yet) know what will happen if a similar survey is done across a wider range of blogs (k-blogs, edublogs, fiction blogs, group blogs, etc).

And while this particular blog didn't make use of blogrolls, there are tools, such as Technorati and other content aggregators, that can serve much the same function (that is, bring together strangers who have both blogged about a similar topic).

This area still appears to be pretty wide open, though there are several other articles in this collection that touch on similar areas.

Posted by: [Dennis G. Jerz](#) at July 5, 2004 10:40 PM

I'm reading this now because my grad students are reading this collection right now-- it's assigned reading, go figure!-- and I too was a fan of the Julie/Julia project.

A couple of things to build on what Dennis said:

\* Actually, one of the things I found kind of interesting about the methodology is I think its arguable that a quantitative measure of "community" just doesn't yield very useful results, which

is why it was at odds with the qualitative results. I do agree though that it'd be interesting to replicate the same kind of methodology with different blogs.

\* I don't so much agree with the idea of the Julie/Julia is too narrow of a blog. For one thing, just because something is narrow and focused doesn't mean that some sense of community can't be formed around it. For another, there were a lot of readers here, and that quantity in itself seems to suggest there's something going on. If that makes sense.

\* And ultimately, I'm not sure its so important that it is about "community" per se. Part of the thought I am left with is this: Just because I'm a reader of a particular author (be it a blog or a book or a columnist) doesn't mean I am going to feel like I'm in a "community." It might mean that if I become "fanatic" about it. Maybe part of what has to happen for it to become a sense of community is for people to become a bit more obsessed.

Posted by: [Steven D. Krause](#) at October 14, 2004 05:20 PM

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