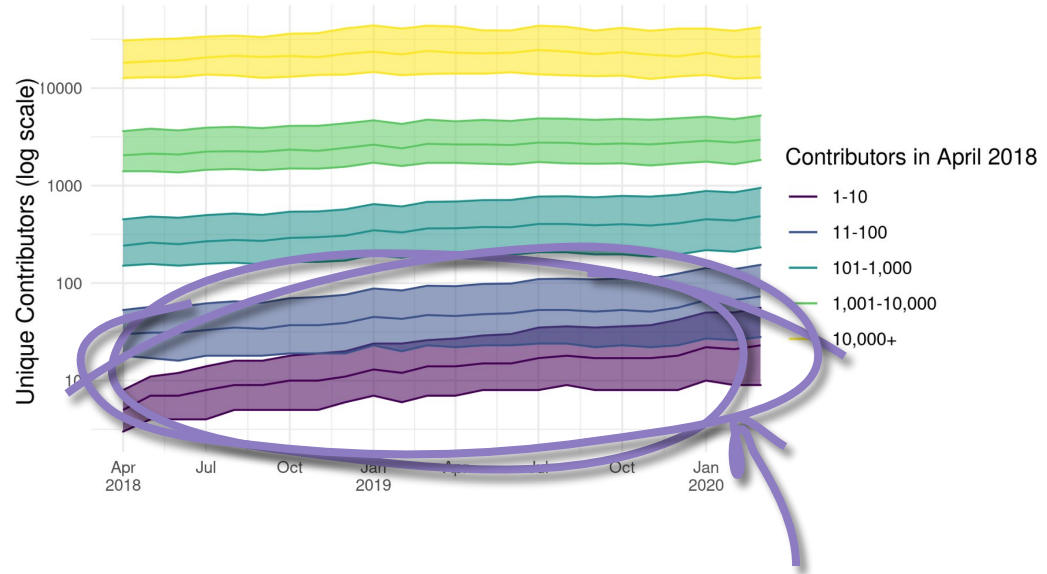


“Bigger = better” narrative:

- More information sources, opportunities, potential relationships,
- Critical mass can help sustain a community and prevent it from dying

suggests that communities will either grow or die...



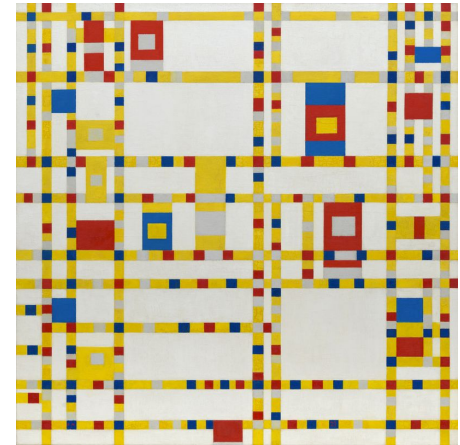
... but small communities
not only exist in great numbers
but also persist in their smallness

Why do people participate in small online communities?



Small communities partition the information landscape, creating clearer expectations of content, interaction, and audience

- Communities are **hyper-specific** in nature about topic, attitude, etc.
 - specific aspect of data processing
 - pregnant women expecting in a certain month
- Participants found these **narrow slices** helped them to meet their needs for expertise or community



Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942-43) as a visual representation of partitions.

Small communities allow people to be in control of their online experiences

"[...] one of the few places on Reddit that I genuinely feel like I found something that feels different." (P11)

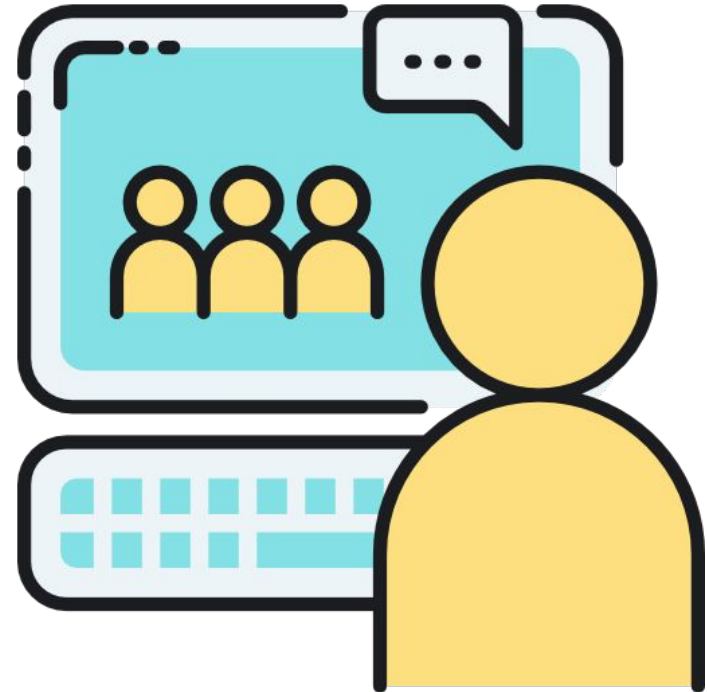
- Not just for Reddit karma (points)
- Manageable trickles of newcomers
- Fewer moderation needs
- Curating experience through multiple small communities



Small communities promote group identity but not interpersonal relationships

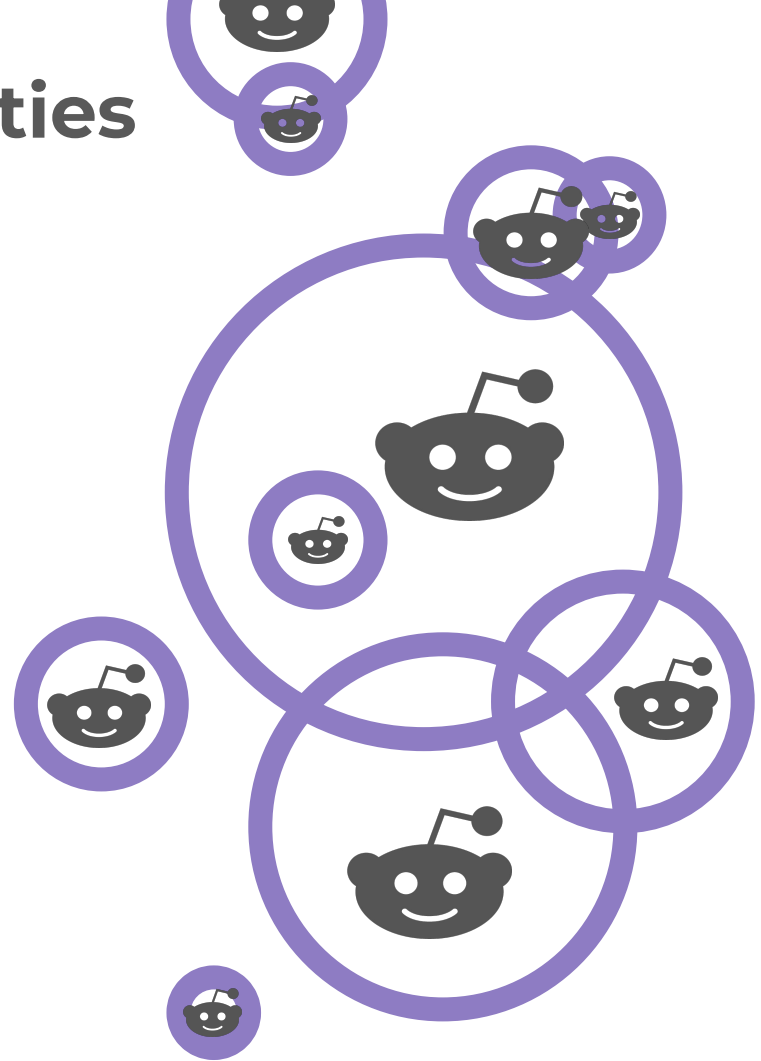
“When you have a really small group of people [...] it’s more likely for everyone to be on the same wavelength...” (P7)

- Users care about the personal, but not the person (in specific)
 - Interest in **unique, human** experiences and expertise being shared
 - Little attention to **who** is actually sharing it



The use of small communities reflect their place within a complex ecosystem of communities

- Small communities as offshoots + smaller granules of a topic
- Small communities **used in tandem with** larger and other related communities



Implications

- Providing **user mechanisms + control** of content curation can improve user experience
 - E.g., managing access to subsets of content (versus a general flow)
- Opportunities for communities to **define their expectations** help (potential) community members anticipate content
- **Making (sub)groups salient** supports meaningful engagement online, even in the absence of one-to-one relationships
- Moving **beyond quantitative metrics** of “success” is key

Thank you!

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Key implications

- **Many** communities start small and stay small and provide a unique set of benefits to their members
- Communities of **various scales help support engagement** on platforms via diverse types of content/interaction
- Moving **beyond quantitative metrics** of “success” is key
 - Platforms should consider and design for small communities

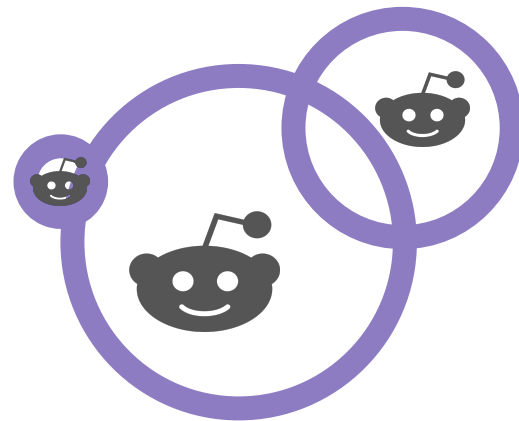
Future directions



- How do small communities **manage the boundaries** of their hyper-specific “slice” within the ecosystem of communities?
- When do these **boundaries change** and how?
- The role of small communities in other social computing systems



etc...



Main takeaways

Small communities can **effectively meet unique informational and interactional needs** of participants in their specificity, **rather than foster dyadic interpersonal bonds** as prior work suggests,



Main takeaways

Small communities can effectively meet unique informational and interactional needs of participants in their specificity, rather than foster dyadic interpersonal bonds as prior work suggests,

are **part of a complex ecosystem of partially overlapping Reddit communities** that participants engage with, which shapes how and why people participate in them.

