

Community Management

IN THE CULTURE WARS

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What We'll Talk About



- What We Know
 - **The science behind what's going on**
- How We Do Things
 - **Community management today, and things now broken**
- What We Can Do
 - **The best practices we know of for this reality**

Before we start



- We're going to try to talk dispassionately about controversial things
 - **Please try to set aside politics for an hour**
- We're going to speak from the perspective of community operators
 - **Everyone's a simple community member somewhere, of course**

WHAT WE KNOW

The science behind what's going on

Have you noticed...



- Greater polarization?
- Increase in apparent harassment campaigns?
- More contentious relationships between devs and players?
- The abandonment of comments?
- Previously unified communities splintering?
- Increase in instances of violent threats?

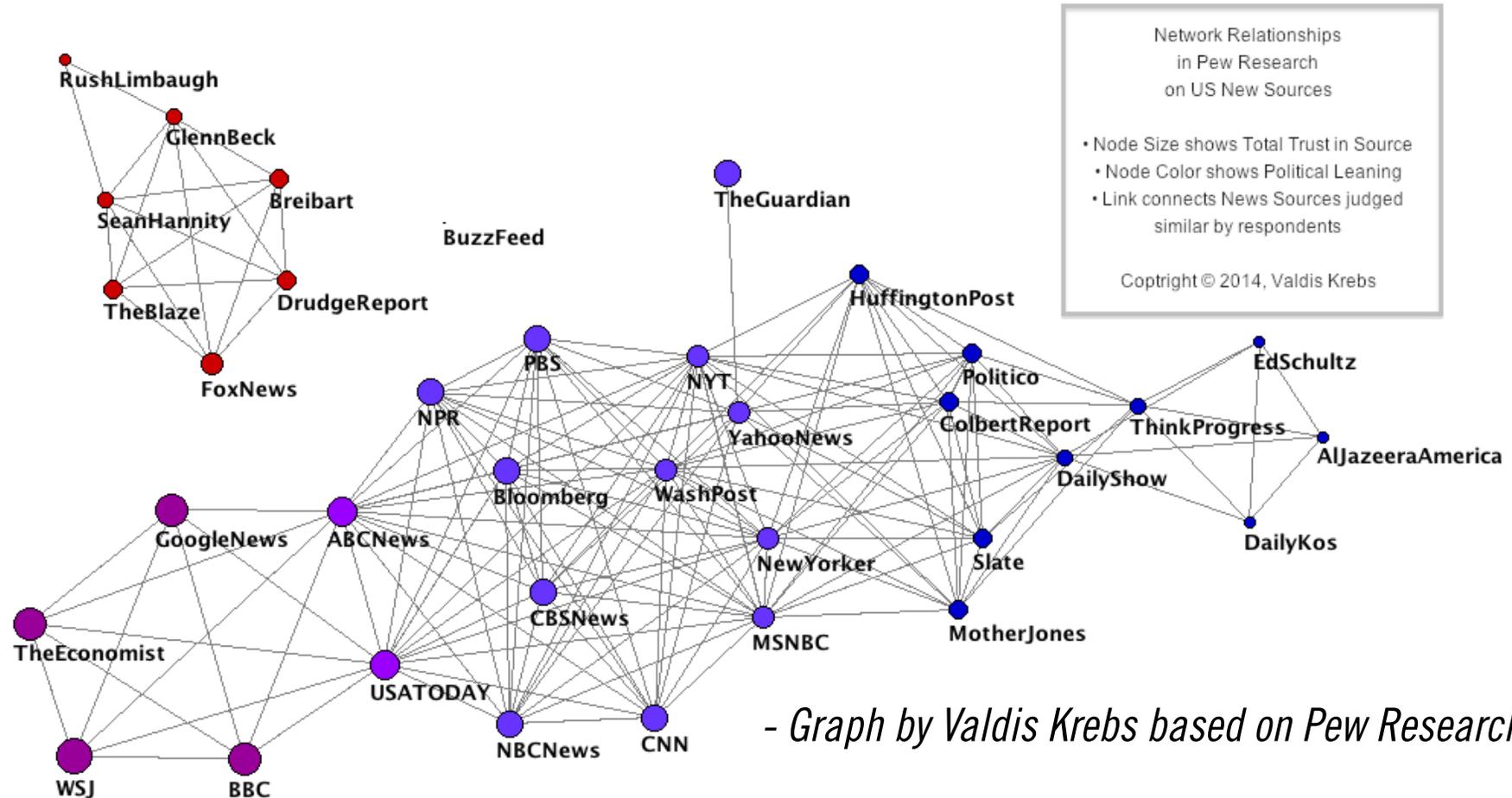
- What's going on?

Filter bubble



- We can personalize our Internet experience quite deeply
 - **“Show me more like this”**
- Companies engage in targeted advertising based on what we seem to like
 - **So we never see things that we dislike or disagree with**
- The result: an experience that only reconfirms biases and never challenges our preconceptions
 - **Which means when we do see something different, it’s alien and horrible**

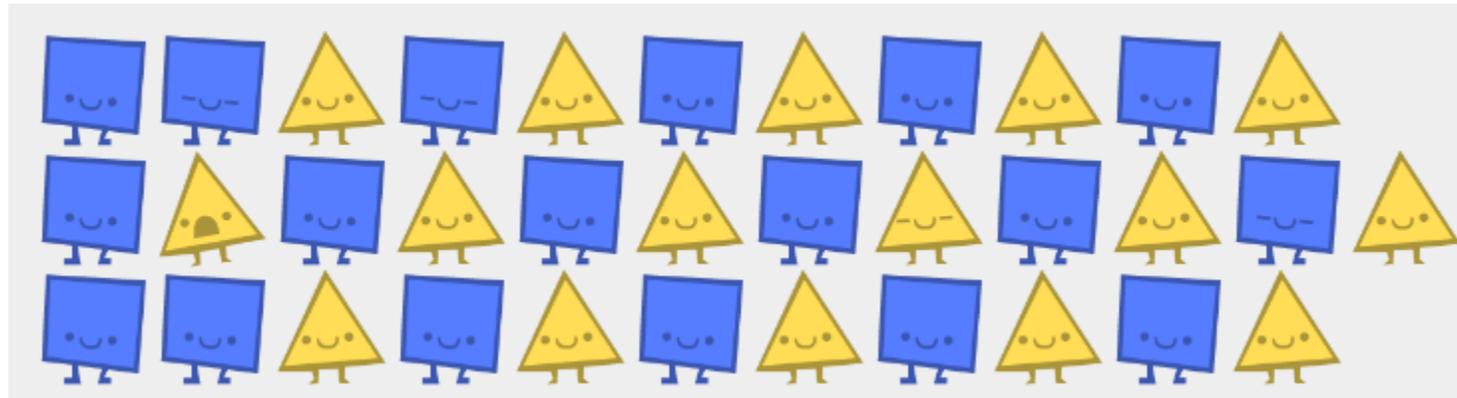
Who trusts what news?



- Graph by Valdis Krebs based on Pew Research data

Self-segregation and Schilling

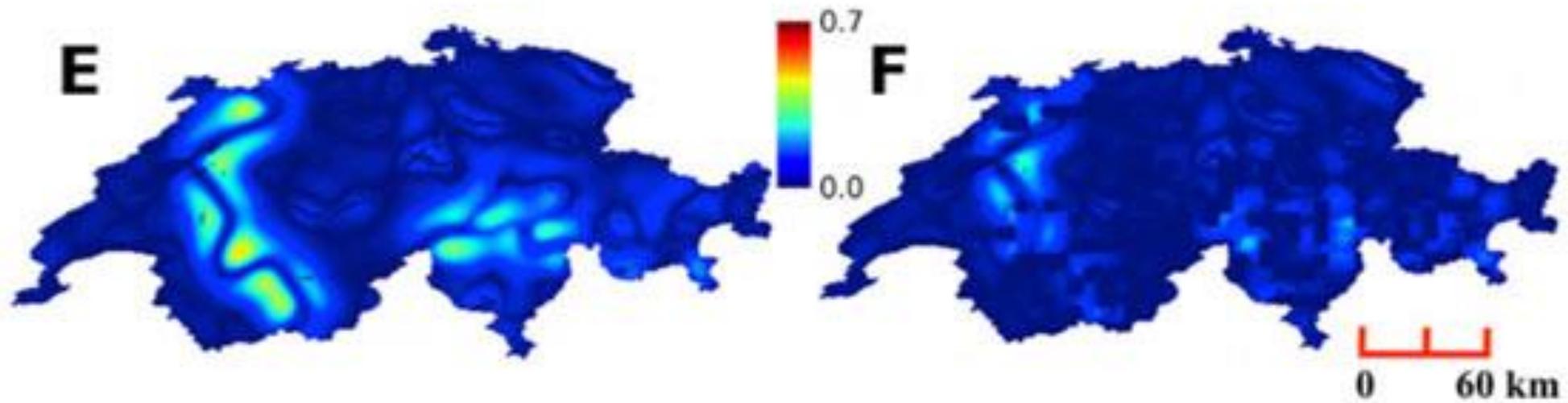
- Given an ability to move towards people more like us or less, even only *slightly* so, we choose to self-segregate into homogenous groups



Lovely game version of this, “The Parable of the Polygons”

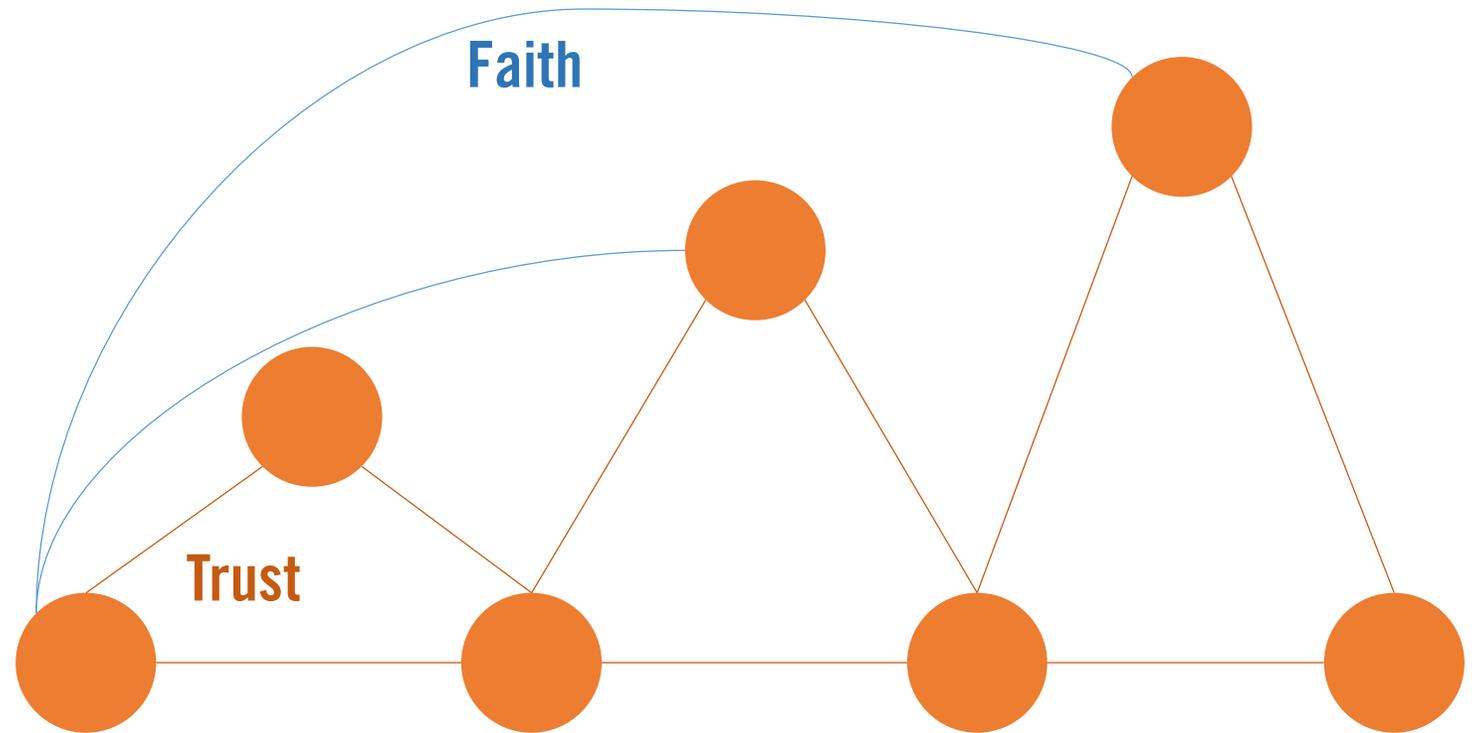
Complexity theory lessons

- Why does Switzerland work?
 - **There's a lot of diversity there, but it's divided into homogeneous cantons.**
 - **Common identity of being Swiss is *very* strong.**



Knowledge, trust, and faith

- Scale and structures of trust
 - **Trust versus faith**
- Repeated interactions are what builds trust
 - **Iterative tit-for-tat, Axelrod**



HOW WE DO THINGS

Community management today
and how it's getting broken

Identity



- Either real name or pseudonyms with accumulated reputation (real or statistical)
 - **Undermined by free to play and ease of account creation**
 - **Undermined by communities forming on sites with varying reputation and identity practices**
 - **Undermined by large scale communities (anonymous in the crowd)**

Good fences and proper scale



- Segmented communities based on interests within the game
 - **Undermined by large forums outside of developer control**
 - **Undermined by sheer popularity**
- Communities with game-specific identities segmented from the larger Internet
 - **Undermined by use of social media sign-ons**
 - **Undermined by use of non-segmented social media (r/games etc)**
- Strong identity labels per title, genre, and for all gamers
 - **Undermined by political forces**
 - **Undermined by the continued movement towards broader audience**

Language context



- Relatively clear lines between diverse industry subcommunities (devs, academics, critics, players, funders, etc)
 - **Undermined by blurring of lines between journalism and criticism**
 - **Undermined by players used as direct funding sources**
- Controlled messaging to the general audience
 - **Undermined by Kickstarter, Early Access, etc**
 - **Undermined by widespread use of publicly visible social media**

The new norm



| | SEGMENTATION | FILTER BUBBLE | MODERATION | ANONYMITY | DOWNVOTES |
|-------------------|---|---------------|------------|-------------------------|-----------|
| Twitter | None; hashtags do the opposite! | Opt-in follow | None | Easy | |
| Reddit | Poor | | Varies | Easy | Brigading |
| Chan sites | Poor | | None | No identity persistence | |
| Facebook | Allows adding 3 rd parties to groups | Opt-in follow | Iffy | | |
| Yik Yak | Pure geography | | None | Mandatory | Downvotes |

Mobbing



**"A mobbing is like a tornado spun off from a spring rainstorm
- a fervent, collective assault that escalates from
an ordinary conflict."**

**-Kenneth Westhues
quoted in "Mob Rule" by John Gravois**

Mobbing

- Is it harassment (legally)? Depends.
 - **A given attacker may only send a single tweet!**
 - **“One person’s activism is another person’s harassment.”**
- Tends to single out those who are different
- One of the factors that increases risk is working in fields with ambiguous standards, including any that are dealing with postmodernism (!)

Consequences of mobbing



“Mobbing can leave the target’s life in turmoil (Glass, 1999), feeling embarrassed, frustrated and untrusting. Symptoms may include ***crying, sleep difficulties, lack of concentration, high blood pressure, gastrointestinal problems, excessive weight loss or gain, depression, alcohol or drug abuse, avoidance of the workplace, and/or uncharacteristic fearfulness*** (Namie & Namie, 2000; Davenport, Schwartz and Elliot, 1999)...

Consequences of mobbing



...For some the degree of symptoms may become severe and include ***severe depression, panic attacks, heart attack, other severe illnesses, accidents, suicide attempts, violence directed at third parties and symptoms of PTSD*** (Namie & Namie, 2000; Davenport, Schwartz and Elliot, 1999)...

Consequences of mobbing



...As emotional and psychological changes take place often physical difficulties follow. Those mobbed have been found to experience ***reduced immunity to infection, heart attacks*** as well as numerous other health problems (Davenport, Schwartz and Elliot, 1999). According to Leymann (n.d.) ***roughly ten to twenty percent*** of those mobbed in his study ***seemed to contract serious illnesses or committed suicide.***”

- “Warning: Mobbing is Legal, Work with Caution” by Housker & Saiz

WHAT WE CAN DO

The best practices we know of for this
new reality

Community segmentation



- Subdivide your community into manageable sizes and common cultures or interests
 - **Make use of Dunbar's Number**
- Create “good fences”
 - **Provide proper interfaces between communities**
 - **Provide meta-communities that serve to connect smaller communities**
- Create “honeypots” for bad behavior
 - **Provide an “unsafe space” for bad behavior to trickle to and remain isolated from the main community (“general forums”)**

Work around anonymity



- Avoid anonymity in general – pseudonymity is OK
 - **Pure social logins may be good for user volume, but probably not for community**
 - **Provide anon *private* reporting channels for issue reporting**
- Provide strong incentives for persistent positive contribution
- Even with pseudonymity, implement a parallel structure for building up persistent reputation

Design mistakes



- Encouraging downvoting, brigading, or other negative feedback loops.
- Failing to provide meta-identity structures that provide common ground between groups.
- Driving intentional tribalism.
 - **You want communities to feel strong and safe, but avoid encouraging a group to see opposition within your user base.**
 - **Instead, emphasize ecological thinking!**
- Promoting filter bubble effects and polarization.

Put yourself in their shoes



This is hard.

The language of diplomacy



- Softening words: “I’m afraid,” “in my opinion.”
- Always phrasing as positive.
- Saying “sorry.”
 - **A lot of people have trouble with this one. But it’s free, unless you have legal liability.**
- Indications of listening: repeat arguments back, say “I hear you.”
- Use “I” or “we” and not “you.”

Language traveling poorly



Try to avoid:

- Terms that mean different things in different communities
 - **Best example these days is “game” (the noun).**
- Terms that are offensive in one community and not in others

(Yes, this means you have to learn their community standards.)

Work with meta-identity



- Games target more than one identity!
 - **Support identity creation around your product: a new identity that can cover more than one faction.**
- Construct your community in a way that focuses on core values
 - **Find the shared values**
- Create a name for your players that stands for that set of shared values

Be firm



- You are in our house and there are rules
 - **This can trump questions of “tone policing” (quite a lot of people don’t know what a tone argument actually is)**
 - **Be sure to have rules, post them, reiterate them, etc**

Shaming the troll



- In some contexts, banning is impossible
- Community shame can work
 - **This is hard to pull off, and you don't want to cause a mob in the other direction**
 - **You have to have a strongly established sense of community to do it**

Doxxing

- Used to be called “the White Pages.”
 - A huge amount of your supposedly private information never was, and is readily available online.

Search > Select Report > Order Summary > Your Report

People Search Report

Includes all 2 search results for Raph Koster in the United States.

Report includes when available:

- ✓ Full Name
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Precautions



- Unlist your numbers.
- Domain name WHOIS protection.
- Disable your phone's geolocation features, especially for photos.
 - **You take them at home, yes?**
- Request removal from identity search firm databases.
 - **Pipl, Intelius, PeopleSmart, InstantCheckmate, BeenVerified, IDTrue, ZabaSearch...**
 - **This won't help in the case of a public records search, e.g. if you own a home.**
- If you believe you are at risk of SWATting, notify your local police dept. so there's a note on your address.
- Run through Jon Jones' excellent guide (link on last slide).

You are always public



- The definition of “public figure” has expanded a lot.
 - **Most anyone working in game development is going to count.**
- Treat all social media venues as 100% public broadcast.
 - **Conform to all standards of professionalism on all of them.**
 - **Facebook is the only one you can lock down, but even there someone can copy/paste.**

Further reading



- “The Parable of the Polygons”, Vi Hart & Nicky Case, <http://ncase.me/polygons/>
- The Mobbing Portal, <http://www.mobbingportal.com/index.html>
- “The Unkindly Art of Mobbing,” Ken Westhues, <http://www.kwesthues.com/unkindlyart.htm>
- “Warning: Mobbing is Legal, Work with Caution” by Jody E. Housker, Ph.D., NCC, LPC and Stephen G. Saiz, Ed.D., NCC, LPC, ACS, http://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/vistas/by-subject2/vistas-professional-development/docs/default-source/vistas/vistas_2006_housker
- “The Online Disinhibition Effect,” John Suler, http://www.academia.edu/3658367/The_online_disinhibition_effect
- The Filter Bubble, by Eli Pariser
- Making Things Work, Yaneer Bar-Yam
- <http://www.thenetworkthinkers.com/>
- “Good Fences: The Importance of Setting Boundaries for Peaceful Coexistence”, Alex Rutherford, Dion Harmon, Justin Werfel, Shlomiya Bar-Yam, Alexander Gard-Murray, Andreas Gros, Yaneer Bar-Yam, <http://arxiv.org/abs/1110.1409v1>
- <http://www.londonschool.com/language-talk/language-tips/5-tips-for-polite-and-diplomatic-language/>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20141006130103-338673--gamergate-survival-guide>, Jon Jones