

substitution... The [communication symbols](#) employed by the new occupant of the slot must be culture-compatible with those of his new neighbors. This is indeed one of the most important general traits of a modern society: cultural homogeneity.

... The standardization of idiom is in any case imposed on this kind of society by the nature of work, which has ceased to be physical, and has become predominantly [semantic](#): work is now the passing and reception of messages, largely between anonymous individuals in a mass society, who cannot normally be familiar with their interlocutors.

Society, especially civil society, depends on shared culture, mores, norms. At the smaller scale, community can enforce its own mores, but as greater and greater scale comes, community collapses into society, and the mores that sustained the older users are incapable of being effectively transmitted to the newly inducted masses.

Maintaining the common institution of culture can be conceived of as a [collective action problem](#). Mancur Olson gave the definitive treatment of the subject in [The Logic of Collective Action](#). According to Olson, [small groups](#) are *qualitatively* different from large groups, when considered in terms of their respective abilities to achieve collective goods. Small groups are small enough that an individual's actions are noticeable by other members. In large groups, the effects of any given user's bad behavior are not necessarily discoverable by all members and there is little incentive for individual members to enforce the group's rules. This is why communities can only function when small, but collapse into societies when their growth outstrips the institutional capacity for individual behavior to be noticed (and punished).

Small groups can be effectively governed when one or a few members are granted greater capabilities to preserve the culture of the community—we call these moderators. While they play a crucial role in most online communities, their ability to police ever-larger numbers of participants is limited. Unfortunately, as the pool of moderators grows and as moderator status becomes increasingly institutionalized, the [iron law of bureaucracy](#) sets in. The transition from "MODS=GDOS" to "[The Cabal](#)" and later to "MODS=FAGS" is a near universal feature of online forums.

As scale overwhelms community and the ability of even well-meaning mods to enforce its norms, society-driven moderation becomes the next option for enforcing cultural homogeneity. Broad swaths of users are given the ability to rate other users and their contributions. For example, [new users might be asked to find sponsors among existing users](#) in order to preserve some level of trust and social links. Ta bu shi da yu detailed the [perverse incentive structure that sponsored users would create](#) (at the time, Shiryk called Ta Bu's opinion "[hysterical](#)"). Rusty, k5's deadbeat dad, eventually agreed with Ta Bu, admitting that sponsorship ["was a stupid idea."](#)

Users also might be asked to rate the degree to which they [trust their fellow users](#), a system prominently employed by Advogato. While [prominent Bay-area musicians have advocated adoption of a similar trust metric for k5](#), the idea was rejected. Our resident 'low-budget Filipino horror story' took time off from [speaking for the vast majority of international governments, civilians, and people of Myanmar](#) to speak for the rest of k5's users regarding the [negative consequences of trust metrics](#): they focus on the individual rather than on their contributions (comments, stories), the outcome being neither community nor society but class conflict and stifling monoculture. As Paul Graham notes in his [assessment of lessons learned from administering Hacker News](#): "It's bad behavior you want to keep out more than bad people. User behavior turns out to be surprisingly malleable. If people are expected to behave well, they tend to; and vice versa."

Furthermore, Advogato's trust metric is not, in fact, attack resistant. Because of the problem of pseudonymity, a [troll posing as Richard Stallman was able to gain Master certification from 288 users without independent verification of his identity](#). Moreover, the attack resistance model is built only to resist multiple dupe accounts under control of a single user. This overlooks the more common internal-culture-war problem, 'attack from within': sites populated by multiple independent trolls, in which destructive behavior can come from multiple actors not necessarily acting in concert, and even from long-running members of the forum.

Alternately, moderation systems like Slashdot's Karma and Digg's [approval](#)-style voting put moderation of content (as opposed to moderation of users) into the hands of the userbase as a whole. While viewing Slashdot comments with an appropriately high threshold is effective in displaying only high quality comments, a vast amount of material that is high-quality yet counter to Slashdot's groupthink remains below the threshold. Slashdot's moderation not only separates the signal from the noise in terms of general comment quality, but also in terms of the degree to which the comment appropriately venerates group icons. Moderation abuse is hardly countered by offering these same users incentives (more moderation power) to moderate moderations. Meanwhile, Digg's uniformly pathetic comment quality is barely a step above [YouTube's](#), despite the existence of moderation.

The bottom line is that no active moderation system, no matter how many users are empowered to rate each other and each other's comments, can preserve community in the face of the multiple identity syndrome inherent to online forums. Incentives, barriers, and moderation cannot counter trolls and dupe accounts—in fact, they may make things worse. If we cannot return to John Allen's Eden despite Shiryk's formulas for success, then we must plan for life in Shii's [Nod](#).

3 — "Technological solutions for social problems"

Shii's optimistic conclusions about the value of anonymity for social interaction are easily rebutted by the hideous, festering cesspool of 4chan's /b/. Not the center subject matter *per se*, because the extremes of its content matter are the essence of /b/. The problem with /b/ is the unbelievable rate of shitting: the same topics over and over, retarded incoherent posts, repetition of tired forced memes. The very occasional strokes of brilliance are rapidly drowned out by noise. 4chan's rapid growth is made possible by the complete lack of barriers to entry. There are no technological barriers—no registration of [4chan Gold Accounts](#)—and no cultural barriers (at least, for any idiot that's discovered the compendium-of-degenerate-culture Encyclopædia Dramatica).

While there may not be technological solutions for [social problems](#), there may be *institutional* solutions for social problems. Shiryk is correct insofar as social dynamics on the web have a technological base: patterns of interaction are shaped by the software used to interact. Knowledge of the capabilities and constraints imposed by forum software conditions how users act, what possibilities they perceive, what type of behavior they expect, and (most importantly) how the system can be gamed. Software is the institutional context within which users act, and within which the collective action problem of maintaining a culture of quality interaction is (hopefully) overcome, despite the problems of scaling, multiple identities, bad behavior, and limited capacity of moderators.

What are the technological (really, institutional) problems that need fixing then?

1. Design with multiple identity syndrome as an unavoidable condition of operating on the internet.
2. Provide effective selective incentives for constructive behavior.
3. Keep barriers to participation as low as possible.
4. Moderation that better reflects quality, as opposed to simple agreement.
5. Moderation that lightens the load on admins.
6. Reduce the ability of users to game the system.

The first condition requires making the identity of the poster less important. Slashdot, Wikipedia, and 4chan all allow anonymous contribution, but go out of their way to distinguish the accountless from users with identity. Slashdot allows 'Anonymous Coward' to post with a -1 'Anonymous penalty'. Wikipedia allows anyone to edit (nearly) anything, but their edits are identified by IP address and [filtered when viewing recent changes](#). 4chan defaults to 'Anonymous' but allows [namefags with secure tripcodes](#). However, an approach that truly de-emphasizes identity would do the opposite of the above sites: *all* comments would appear without any indicators of identity. Users with or without accounts would be indistinguishable. Unlike [FORCED ANON](#) on 4chan, which did not allow for persistent identities, such a system would allow for user identity, but only in private. A user could have an account, but there would be no public acknowledgment of their identity linked to their posts.

In such a system, there would be a lesser incentive to trolling. Without particular individuals to follow, persistently baiting and harassing individual users would more difficult. The attention whoring and unwarranted self-importance of trolls would be more difficult to sustain in forced anonymity. Of course, this would not prevent more generic trolling (starting flamewars on partisan politics, operating systems, religion), but it would mitigate some of the more abusive forms.

Second, selective incentives ought to be provided for constructive behavior. Unlike sites that use social status to indicate constructive users, and thereby focus on individual vs. individual comparisons (giving new targets for grieving, trolling, and anti-social behavior), the incentives provided to users ought to be private in keeping with the forced anonymity. Slashdot gives users with 'excellent' karma automatically upmodded comments, Hacker News briefly highlighted good users with [orange-colored usernames](#), kuro5hin used to have trusted users with special rating abilities, and so on. Just as user identity ought to be private, so too must incentives/status be private. The incentives for retaining one persistent identity are usually related to personalization and a record of all of one's comments, bookmarks, and other activities. Incentives for constructive behavior generally revolve around granting users more influence: more moderation power, more prominent comments, more access to control, more influence over the front page. Most of these are fine, but the focus is off: instead of rewarding good behavior with unique opportunities for more constructive contributions, they reward good behavior with opportunities for control, influence, and negation.

The third condition requires making it as easy to comment as possible. Don't make the user register an account to post a comment. Don't make the user learn a markup language to format their post correctly—Google's rich text composed in Gmail is a good example of avoiding the problem of making a user learn HTML, BBCode, or Wiki markup. Don't prevent them from posting by making them jump through hoops such as the impossible-to-satisfy Slashdot "Lameness Filter" or the mute-banning [Robot 9000](#) from xkcd's IRC channel and 4chan's /r9k/ board. Obvious and strict [wordfilters](#) encourage users to game the system rather than work to write better posts. The result is a commenting system that favors those that spend the time to master technical details over those who write useful contributions without knowing the intricacies of the site's parochial commenting system.

Fourth, moderation systems ought to be geared toward identifying quality contributions, rather than signaling agreement. Current moderation systems are based on the premise that better comments will end up with better scores. This approach is wrongheaded and flawed. As anyone familiar with Digg's wretched comments can attest, clicking 'thumbs up' on a snarky, flamebaiting, or erroneously one-liner signals almost nothing about the actual quality of the comment. Approval voting systems, wherein comment worth is represented by a raw number score, create an "I agree with this post" dynamic to moderation. There is precious little difference between numerical score-based moderation and the <AOL>Me too!!!</AOL> posts that began flooding into Usenet in September 1993.

Slashdot is the only major forum with a comment moderation system that takes a step in the right direction. While all of its moderation options are either +1 or -1, they all include some kind of descriptor allowing the moderator to assert *why* the post deserves a higher (or lower) score: insightful, informative, interesting, funny, offtopic, troll, flamebait, etc. Yet they're still wedded to a score-based moderation system. A set of moderation options that reflected quality rather than "I agree with this post" would be a further step in the right direction. No numerical score ought to be visible. The moderation options would be the descriptions of the comments we'd like to see—informative, informative links, engages parent directly, witty—and of the comments we'd like to see less of—one-liner, personal attack, flamebait, troll, abusive links, spam, offtopic. Options to express agreement could be provided too, in order to prevent the descriptive moderation options from standing in as proxies for agreement (moderators rating comments they disagreed with highly in terms of quality might be given extra weight, assuming they're moderating in good faith). Score-based moderation systems foster groupthink and the promotion of content-less one-liners to the detriment of actual conversation. Moderation centered around what makes a good post provides an institutional foundation for altering the dynamics of users' moderation behavior.

To further emphasize the quality-not-agreement aspect of moderation, scarcity ought to be applied. Slashdot's system of dispensing a few moderation pellets to its users on occasion works on the basis of scarcity, but suffers from being arbitrary and temporally contingent. A moderation system that operates on scarcity could value a user's moderations at a certain weight over a period of time—the more they moderate, the more they dilute their influence. The stock of moderation weight (ranging from pro-ana to [presser](#)) assigned to each user could vary according to criteria such as length of membership and quality of their contributions. Unlike Digg, where persistent users can set up scripts to digg hundreds of stories a day, thereby rewarding hideously pathetic levels of persistence, a system in which individual influence is scarce reduces the returns to becoming a 'power user.'

Fifth, and closely related to the above point, moderation systems need to be designed to lighten the load on moderators, whether they are admins or the regular users themselves. Paul Graham [has become a believer](#) in the "[broken windows](#)" theory of maintaining order: small violations of the spirit of expected behavior, if persistent and unchecked, can undermine broader adherence to those norms. To wit: if a rule is unenforced and constantly violated, is it really a rule? The solution that xkcd's Randall Munroe hit upon after reviewing the standard options faced by all rapidly scaling communities—restricted entry, moderators, user moderation, and sub-communities—was a system of [passive moderation](#). Moderation would be automatically applied according to a predetermined set of criteria specifying what qualities a good comment would have. In Munroe's case, originality was the key, and any commenters attempting to say something that had already been said before would be penalized by increasing mute times. A similar project, the [StupidFilter](#), being [developed by one of our own](#), uses Bayesian logic to identify stupid comments based on a seed group of human-identified stupid comments. The [criteria for stupidity](#) include: over- or under-capitalization, too many text message abbreviations, excessive use of 'LOL' or exclamation points, and so on. Spam identification systems for email and blog comments (e.g. [Akismet](#) for WordPress) do much the same thing. Identifying commonalities in junk messages and containing them in a junk/spam purgatory awaiting moderation.

Passive moderation can help solve the problem of moderator overload, just as spam filters aid managing one's email inbox or blog comments. Reducing the number of full-time admins to do moderation reduces the proclivities toward the "iron law of bureaucracy" and toward user-moderation abuse. Like the above passive systems, a Robot9000++ could be set to identify general characteristics of comments that make them good or bad: not only originality, but also ideal length of the post (with diminishing returns after a certain point), presence of links, paragraph structure, and so on. Likewise, it could identify posts that the typical profile of destructive or idiotic behavior: one-liners, ad hominem, common insults, links to shock sites, etc. False positives would be an issue, hopefully less of one over time if it had a Bayesian capacity to learn. But effective admin intervention and/or user moderation could correct erroneously downmodded comments.

Sixth, effective moderation systems will function best when pushed as far into the background of user interaction with the forum as possible. Munroe discovered, as did [moot](#) shortly thereafter, that announcing the rules of the game results in conversations and threads being overwhelmed by meta discussion and boundary-testing. Those with a stake in circumventing moderation (trolls, griefters, spammers, craploaders, the usual set of malcontents) quickly discover the limits, whereas those who don't have the time to invest in circumventing the controls remain constrained ("when moderation is the law, only outlaws will be unmoderated"). Passive moderation and wordfilters ought not be immediately perceivable by the user: instead of blocking the user, muting them, or denying the comment from being posted, the systems should let the comment through. An automatic downmoderation ought to be applied to the offending post such that it will be below the threshold of normal comment viewing. However, downmodded comments ought to be discoverable and corrected by user moderation in the case of false positives. By obfuscating passive moderation systems, forums can achieve 'society through obscurity,' preventing moderation criteria from easy discoverability and gaming.

4 — The lowest common denominator

If it is indeed possible to construct a functioning scalable society within Eternal September, the question becomes, can we work backwards from society toward a reconstruction of community? Can communities discover themselves within society, without the creation of formal sub-groups? Can Gellner's 'modular man' re-enter a network of communal ties without the totalizing, exclusive, and oppressive aspects of Shiryk's vision of online community?

There are two aspects to this problem:

- what links between users are indicative of community; and,
- what mode of content creation and consumption will sustain a coherent community?

[Constructive conversation is central to community](#), not ideological like-mindedness or commonality of interests. Too many forums attempt to provide sub-communities on the basis of user self-selection, allowing the user to place themselves in categories of ideology, allegiance, or taste (e.g. Facebook groups, Last.fm groups, [Wikipedian userboxes](#), etc.). Just as trading flames and *ad hominem*s does not make for lasting interaction, groups of like-minded users decrying offenses to their objects of veneration and offering 'me too!' posts are among the least interesting forms of interaction on the internet. (Shiryk discusses these [self-destructive forms of group interaction](#), citing psychoanalyst [W.R. Bion](#)'s 1961 volume [Experiences in Groups](#).)

Placing conversation at the center of analysis changes how we think about constructive interaction. Current moderation schemes focus on discrete comments as the unit of analysis: a comment is either good or bad in and of itself. Slashdot's foster care practice of reparenting highly moderated comments attached to poorly rated parents is indicative of this comment-as-island-unto-itself mode of thought. But if constructive conversation is the goal, the comment itself is the wrong unit of analysis. The conversation—the series of comments responding to one another—is the proper unit of analysis, and the most important aspects are not inherent to the comments themselves but are *relational*.

Conversation and moderation are not just content creation or judgments. Replying to

It's a lot more complicated (2.66 / 3) (#8)
by [tdillo](#) on Thu Mar 12, 2009 at 12:54:16 PM EST

There is a difference in culture. The types of people that had access to the internet pre-1993 are much different than the types of people that have access to it now.

One can't blame it on cluelessness, that is just elitism. The fact is that not everybody views a forum the same way. Their reasons for using it are not the same, what they expect to get out of the forum are not the same, even the devices they use to access it are different and that makes a big difference.

When Jimbo got Wikipedia going it never even occurred to me to vandalize. I was actually shocked when I found out that some people I knew were actively vandalizing 'just for the lulz'. They weren't 12yr olds either or AOL rejects, but young professionals. They just look at the Web/Internet differently than I do.

Even here at K5 there has been an evolution. Used to be the Front Page was the focus of the site and modsub had some type of importance. The Diary section on the other hand was just something that was there. It was even called the "Ghetto". At that time I rarely read anything in the Diary section unless things were just really slow.

Now, I can tell from comments that for some the FP still has some importance. From my point of view however, the Diary section **has become** K5 and modsub is the ghetto. I don't really know if this is better or worse, it's just different. All I know for sure is that the users here now view K5 differently than the users did when I started.

Look at MeFi, although it appears very similar to what it did say just 5 yrs ago if you are a member of that community it has a different feel today than it did previously. AskMe is now a larger focus than 'the Blue'.

As for community, I think there is plenty of community. Now, true somebody that is not inside might look at k5 and go, wow these people have no respect whatsoever for each other and come away thinking if there is any community it is dysfunctional at best. Still, the interactions that occur on K5 are pretty damn close to the interactions that my friends and I engage in in real life. So actually from where I sit K5 has **more** of a community than it did previously.

Same with Wikipedia, same with MeFi, same with Slashdot, there is community there although it most certainly is not the same community that was there a few years ago.

Now, how does all this apply to the greater web and forums in general? Well I guess I have to agree with CTS on this. It's just something you have to accept. That the forum you set up no matter what you do, once you add people into the mix you have lost control.

Like a Hollywood movie it can be sort of pointed in a certain direction but what you end up with may have very little to do with what you started out with. Similar to authoring a story, I understand that once the characters are on the page oftentimes the story begins to take on a life of it's own and may end up very different from what the author intended.

What seems to me is that what kills many sites is a small group of people that fight hard to keep things just like they always were. But the environment changes and so the denizens of the environment have to change or die. And sadly, sometimes despite everything, things just die. And as we are now seeing with many businesses sometimes it is best to just let them die rather than attempt to keep them on some sort of life-support merely prolonging the pain.

In the conclusion you say that "There are serious problems with existing web forums" institutional capacity to sustain constructive interaction over the long term. Perhaps this isn't a problem so much as it is just the way it is, that nothing lasts forever.

Actually if you think about it, we used to talk about web-related things in terms of "Internet Time". Well, if you look at it that way then K5 and many other forums like MeFi, Slashdot, etc. have been around a HELL of a long time.

I think that a paraphrase of [Spafford's quote](#) concerning USENET is appropriate;

Web forums are like a herd of performing elephants with diarrhea -- massive, difficult to redirect, awe-inspiring, entertaining, and a source of mind-boggling amounts of excrement when you least expect it.

The stories and information posted here are artistic works of fiction and falsehood.Only a fool would take anything posted here as fact.

- [it was better before the diaries existed](#) by boxed, 03/13/2009 04:16:04 AM EST (3.00 / 2)
 - [I think your comment illustrates well](#) by tdillo, 03/13/2009 12:21:07 PM EST (2.40 / 5)
 - [I disagree.](#) :) by aphael, 03/15/2009 06:25:25 PM EST (**none** / 0)
- [For some reason bits of this...](#) by rlazur, 03/13/2009 07:41:59 AM EST (**none** / 1)
- [Re: It's a lot more complicated](#) by anaesthetica, 03/13/2009 02:17:49 PM EST (1.50 / 2)

sounds good (none / 1) (#14)
by [lit](#) on Thu Mar 12, 2009 at 07:07:51 PM EST

where do i sign up?

I actually read all this and (2.20 / 5) (#16)
by [mybostinks](#) on Thu Mar 12, 2009 at 08:16:14 PM EST

I thought it was an excellent effort.

FP when it goes to voting.

Fantastic article (1.66 / 3) (#17)
by [eavier](#) on Thu Mar 12, 2009 at 09:11:21 PM EST

and probably the most coherent piece yet identifying how to blow Kuronia out of the doldrums.

Front page vote from me.

Whatever you do, don't take it into your house. It's probably full of Greeks. - Vampire Zombie Abu Musab al Zargawi

[Ufology Doktor in da house](#)

Sounds like usenet crossed with a magazine. (2.57 / 7) (#25)
by [Pentashagon](#) on Fri Mar 13, 2009 at 01:23:32 AM EST

Usenet had all the society and community you could ask for; just pick the group where each mode of communication was appropriate and cross-post if it mattered enough to multiple groups. Troll handling was by kill-file or moderation. Anonymity was readily available if desired. Article/story/comment rating was lacking, but generally people tried to choose newsgroups that they could read the entirety of new posts in order to personally rate all the content. Perhaps the failure of such models ties into your analysis of stable group sizes; when the good newgroups got too popular, they died because no one could keep up with the amount of content, and quality suffered.

The thing that made k5 different from usenet (as far as I can tell; I never spent much time on either in the "good" old days) is that people would post much longer and more detailed articles or stories on k5. More journalistic than usenet, in a sense.

The problem with a community that wants well researched, interesting articles posted daily is that it takes a lot of authors a lot of time to write them, and the people who once had time to write them will eventually get jobs or families (or die) and disappear. The community has to gain new members at approximately the same rate as it loses old members, and most importantly it needs new members from the same demographic as departing members to maintain the balance of the community. This, I think, is ultimately where every forum, newsgroup, and community site has met its end.

Another problem, as you said, is the eternal September that raised the noise floor above the signal in most places and made it difficult and discouraging to do anything of any value on the Internet without some sort of moderation. Moderation requires people who care a lot about it to spend a lot of time moderating. The stupid filter is a great idea, except there would likely be no penisbuid or ascii art re-enactment guy. Automatic filters require essentially human intelligence, or at least human augmentation to work well. I like the idea of completely anonymous posting. The problem is that it's not enforceable; people start adding signatures or signing their posts with ppg to get around anonymity and attract a loyal following.

A further problem is that trolls generally have the upper hand when it comes to contributing what can devote to trolling. To make this worse, many of the contributing members of the community or society take it upon themselves to fight the trolls instead of kill-filing them, which detracts from their overall usefulness to the community doing other things. This multiplies the troll's advantage, because the troll only has to collect a few normal members as anti-trolls in order to magnify their trolling effect many times. Additionally, the community can be caused to eat itself via trolling, by introducing infighting between the members who fight the trolls and the members who just want to ignore them. I think this is an important part of healthy communities and societies; they need effective ways of dealing with trolls that don't eat into normal activity. Moderation, filtering, and anonymity can't protect a community from itself. Get a bunch of smart know-it-alls together and it's generally trivial to troll a good percentage of them. That is, essentially, the demographic that a site like k5 tries to attract.

So anyway, is this the next obligatory k5 coding project? Code up a working replacement for k5?

- ["Usenet Magazine", from Condé Nast](#) by anaesthetica, 03/13/2009 01:39:12 PM EST (1.50 / 2)
 - [The next Great Experiment](#) by Pentashagon, 03/13/2009 07:20:16 PM EST (**none** / 1)
 - [You're describing something similar to the...](#) by anaesthetica, 03/14/2009 02:37:19 PM EST (**none** / 1)

tj;dr +1fp \$ (2.20 / 5) (#27)
by [th0m](#) on Fri Mar 13, 2009 at 05:19:22 AM EST

- [+1AWTP \\$](#) by Enlarged to Show Texture, 03/13/2009 08:42:49 AM EST (**none** / 0)

tj;dr (1.20 / 5) (#28)
by [Wen Jian](#) on Fri Mar 13, 2009 at 05:51:34 AM EST

It was an experiment in lulz. - Rusty

ok, i actually read it this time before posting (1.00 / 2) (#34)
by [circuitimesquare](#) on Fri Mar 13, 2009 at 10:43:56 AM EST

i have no criticism

i bow down before your genius

The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.

-1, way too fucking long (1.00 / 2) (#36)
by [LilDebbie](#) on Fri Mar 13, 2009 at 11:28:25 AM EST

and yes, i did read the entire thing. the last third of the article could be cut without affecting the overall narrative.

since it will probably post anyway for the same reasons i plan to critique about the content of the article itself, i'll reserve that detail for my after lunch rebuttal.

My name is LilDebbie and I have a garden.
- [hugin](#) -

FW:FW:FW:FW:FW:FWD:FW:FWD:-1 Not enough horsecock\$ (1.42 / 7) (#39)
by [schlouse](#) on Fri Mar 13, 2009 at 02:08:38 PM EST

previous comment should've been editorial (2.28 / 7) (#40)
by [LilDebbie](#) on Fri Mar 13, 2009 at 02:17:16 PM EST

first off, what you set out to achieve isn't a forum. it's a newspaper, or a journal if you prefer; something with all the trappings of propriety and academic pretense. i invite you to make comparisons to the offline versions of your subject. examples of offline forums would include congress and parliaments, which as you are no doubt familiar are all a far cry from the forum idealized here in this article. the british house of commons, for example, makes the diary ghetto look civil in comparison.

why is the distinction important? you incorrectly identify the emphasis on discussion when it is really publishing that interests you. not that there's anything wrong with that. far be it for me to question another man's pretenses, but you are confusing content with style, the article itself being exemplary of the sort of discourse you wish to achieve.

again, let us compare to an offline version. in keeping with the user-generated spirit of things, i submit *nature* as the closest approximation of your intended result with the normal editorial department replaced with either an automated or user-oriented moderation process.

the filters you propose will merely automate the consolidation of groupthink, the bayesian "stupidfilter". for example, would no doubt penalize my style of writing even though you seem to think it worthy enough to quote. furthermore, setting it up as a passive moderation system will do little to deter people from gaming it. users will quickly infer the metrics by analyzing the result. we're clever monkeys that way.

and finally i fail to see the purpose of building a scalable, anonymous queue. ostensibly, you would want it to scale in order to promote its profile over smaller sites, but what incentive would users have to contribute? if your only concern is the promotion of memes, then you shouldn't sweat stylistic details and learn to live with the one-liners and crapfloods, which as a beltway insider you must grudgingly admit are legitimate means of promotion. that leaves resume building which you obviously can't do with anonymous submissions.

of course, i'm of the opinion that most people who bitch about trolls and crapflooders are whiny little bitches who never contributed much in the first place, but that's just my opinion.

My name is LilDebbie and I have a garden.
- [hugin](#) -

- [oh my droog](#) by anaesthetica, 03/13/2009 04:15:39 PM EST (1.50 / 2)

boggles the mind (1.66 / 3) (#44)
by [loatek](#) on Fri Mar 13, 2009 at 04:47:53 PM EST

this is obviously actually written for k5 and is not some kind of academic research paper... i stand in awe that people actually take the time to put these thoughts together, much less coherently put them down and modsub them.

very good article, somebody someday will use it to build a community, but it will certainly not be rusty's k5.

""You're in tune to the musical sound of loatek hi-fi, the musical sound that moves right round. Keep on moving ya'll."
-Mylakovich
"WHAT AN ETERNAL MOBIUS STRIP OF FELLATIATIC BANALITY THIS IS." -[Harry B Otch](#)

Seeking education/knowledge from millions of (1.50 / 4) (#45)
by [MotorMachineMercenary](#) on Fri Mar 13, 2009 at 05:02:46 PM EST

blithering retards is doomed to failure no matter which way you cut it. You learn by critically analysing text from reputable sources, and by actually stepping away from your Internet flame wars and doing things yourself. Populist Internet forums will never have the necessary structure and quality control imposed upon them to become reputable. There is no large, open Internet forum that produces mostly reliable, original thought.

- [You're right about education/knowledge](#) by anaesthetica, 03/13/2009 05:54:03 PM EST (2.40 / 5)
- [ever hear of wikipedia?](#) by circuitimesquare, 03/14/2009 08:33:39 AM EST (**none** / 0)
 - [Technically Wikipedia is not supposed to...](#) by anaesthetica, 03/14/2009 02:41:41 PM EST (**none** / 1)

Excellent (2.14 / 7) (#49)
by [localroger](#) on Fri Mar 13, 2009 at 07:53:51 PM EST

Extremely well-reasoned, I'm sold for now (though I do see the potential for some second-order problems, they come under the tomorrow can take care of itself tag). If I was running K5 I'd take this very seriously.

Unfortunately, the folks running K5 have ignored a lot of other stuff I'd have taken very seriously, including some stuff I wrote and even travelled to Maine to say in person, so this probably won't change anything. But thanks very much for trying.

And that is what is so great about the internet. It enables pompous blowhards to connect with other pompous blowhards in a vast circle jerk of pomposity. -- Bill Maher

- [wrong approach](#) by circuitimesquare, 03/14/2009 08:48:05 AM EST (2.57 / 7)
 - [Rusty has answered the magic number q before](#) by localroger, 03/14/2009 12:34:21 PM EST (2.50 / 6)
- [Well, this article isn't really about k5 itself](#) by anaesthetica, 03/14/2009 02:32:20 PM EST (1.66 / 3)

Damned interesting. (2.42 / 7) (#51)
by [The Amazing Idiot](#) on Sat Mar 14, 2009 at 06:34:36 AM EST

Even though I havent an essay about this topic, I've seen it in action on Usenet and other web forums.

Your big idea is that anonymity would generally help many forums as it would counteract vanity. I would be interested in your take on a usage of GPG signing as to re-create a identity.

Case in point: I used to talk to a bunch of people on Usenet. It got to the point that others were getting on hacker newsservers and trying to clone us. After that, we ended up setting up GPG (back then it was hosted at MIT), privately sharing keys and then signing/encrypting our posts.

Of course, group-encrypt was very frowned upon, as Usenet was a medium "Available to all", and we turned it upside down to "Available for a few". But our goal, to thwart the tards, was successful. After not being able to even read what was being said, they left for better pastures.

But, after the run-in on Use oh-so many years ago, signing would still be very useful in recreating a striped identity. What's your take, and how/if/why would you get rid of it?

- [Credit where it's due: Anonymity is Shii's idea](#) by anaesthetica, 03/16/2009 04:41:36 PM EST (**none** / 1)

missing from your analysis: fark (2.28 / 7) (#53)
by [circuitimesquare](#) on Sat Mar 14, 2009 at 08:37:55 AM EST

http://www.alexas.com/data/details/traffic_details/fark.com

it has a good sense of community, very witty content (albeit, in terms of witty one liner headlines)

its the link-blurb you talk about taken to high frat boy art form

users vote on submissions, there is also heavy moderation, automatic and human

and the comment interaction is actually quite rich, even though it is depressingly flat (no nesting of comments)

too bad i got banned. what's wrong with korean dog bbq images in a dog lovers thread? LOLWTFOMG

The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.

- [I guess I'm content to let Fark continue to](#) by anaesthetica, 03/14/2009 02:59:59 PM EST (2.25 / 4)
 - [i don't know that much but](#) by circuitimesquare, 03/14/2009 03:19:46 PM EST (2.00 / 3)

do you teach media ecology at nyu? (1.00 / 2) (#61)
by [circuitimesquare](#) on Sat Mar 14, 2009 at 06:20:27 PM EST

The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.

- [Nope -- live in the mid-atlantic region](#) by anaesthetica, 03/14/2009 11:47:54 PM EST (**none** / 1)
 - [weird](#) by circuitimesquare, 03/15/2009 03:14:42 AM EST (2.25 / 4)
 - [glacial pace indeed](#) by zenofchai, 03/16/2009 01:13:27 PM EST (2.00 / 3)
 - [You're right about 2channel](#) by anaesthetica, 03/16/2009 02:26:01 PM EST (1.50 / 2)
 - [you mean 2chan? japan's Id?](#) by circuitimesquare, 03/16/2009 03:48:32 PM EST (**none** / 0)

if someone want to implement and admin it, (2.25 / 4) (#62)
by [Morally Inflexible](#) on Sat Mar 14, 2009 at 10:51:02 PM EST

I'd host it and cover bandwidth. it sounds like a good theory, but it needs to be tested.

hard hitting and insightful (none / 1) (#68)
by [GrubbyBeardedHermit](#) on Mon Mar 16, 2009 at 10:52:57 AM EST

at least, the first paragraph was.

the rest, not so much

GBH

Only one point I have time to discuss... (2.00 / 3) (#71)
by [codespace](#) on Mon Mar 16, 2009 at 03:30:03 PM EST

...and that's the "enforced anonymity" you suggest. I personally think that even *allowing* anonymity on the internet is what fosters the type of troll personas that seem so prevalent in internet communities. 4chan is a prime example of that.

today on how it's made: kitchen knives, mannequins, socks and hypodermic needles.

Conversations (1.50 / 2) (#74)
by [Levesque](#) on Mon Mar 16, 2009 at 06:43:41 PM EST

Conversations. I've found myself, because of the quality of the thread, rating every comment in it and then thinking "hey even the one liner that started the thread deserves a +3".

Even on their own, one liners without replies can be valuable. So I'm sure conversation is a main point but it certainly is not the point, though I've felt that "conversations" do deserve better standout, preservation, access, or classification. (Not saying you said, I'm just flying over the issue of moderation)

Not directly related but sometimes I've thought it would be good if I could tag other's comments and posts.

Diaries and queues. I like your distinction between "Society the large" and "Community the unit". Maybe users could be diary tested for a while and if you pass you can post to "subject queues", and maybe others could move you there too (though I've vaguely alluded to this before). I think having a real diary section is good and also contrary to what I've implied before I think a fiction section is fine.

I consider most of my comments as drafts drafts, or brainstorming, or whatever and diaries doesn't seem the right place, i.e. as you say maybe a "draft/idea cue, it could have a max of one post per week, or something.

I was all behind real anonymity --everyone has the same user name-- but then it occurred to me it would be easy to id yourself in comments anyway. Still sounds useful but I just read codejack's comment and the parts of your story that speak to anonymity, and not sure anymore if I follow what you mean.

I go on because I do believe an "open environment" has the best grounding and potential to harbor high value discourse of relevance.

I like your article, lots of good content.

- [Thanks](#) by anaesthetica, 03/16/2009 07:27:10 PM EST (**none** / 1)
 - [Thanks](#) by Levesque, 03/22/2009 06:44:26 PM EST (**none** / 1)

[Attacked from Within](#) | 76 comments (60 topical, 16 editorial, 0 hidden)

Display: Sort:

[Kuro5hin](#)

[FAQ](#)
All trademarks and copyrights on this page are owned by their respective companies. The Rest © 2000 - Present Kuro5hin.org Inc.

See our [legalese page](#) for copyright policies. Please also read our [Privacy Policy](#).

Kuro5hin.org is powered by [Free Software](#), including [Apache](#), [Perl](#), and [Linux](#). The [Scoop Engine](#) that runs this site is freely available, under the terms of the GPL.

Need some help? Email help@kuro5hin.org.

My heart's the long stairs.

[scoop](#) [help/FAQ](#) | [mission](#) | [links](#) | [search](#) | [IRC](#) | [YOU choose the stories!](#)