

# Xbox community

## Go Inside the Xbox Community

Jump into the community of Xbox LIVE and experience gaming events, sweepstakes, promotions, and more. Whether you're winning prizes or gaming with celebrities, there's always something to do on Xbox LIVE.



ESPN Bowl Showdown

Enter for your chance to win a trip to the ESPY Awards or a tour of ESPN Headquarters.



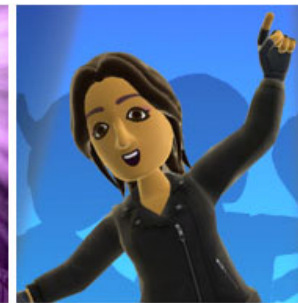
Family Game Night

Get the whole family in on the fun and play every Tuesday on Family Game Night.



GamerchiX Ladies Night

Every Wednesday is Ladies Night where girls gather to play on Xbox LIVE. Chix unite!



Gamer Spotlight

We shine the spotlight on a member of the Xbox LIVE gaming community.



Xbox LIVE Frag Doll Friday

Take on the fierce female gamers known as the Frag Dolls on Frag Doll Fridays.

## XBox Live – Design Suggestions

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## Introduction

This paper suggests design alternatives for the Xbox Live Community that supports communal interactions through forums, events and reputation scores. Microsoft Corporation initially introduced Xbox live to support online multiplayer gaming and digital content delivery. After its launch, this community has become the most popular place for discussing and sharing personal experiences of Xbox 360 gaming. Xbox Live could be accessed by visiting <http://www.xbox.com/live> or through the Console. On February 5, 2010, Marc Whitten (General Manager of Xbox Live) announced that Xbox Live reached 23 million subscribers and is now available in 26 countries/territories. On November 19, 2009, Xbox Live announced its integration with Facebook, Twitter and Last.fm community but this integration has been limited only to Xbox Gold (a paid service) members. Although there are plenty of features on Xbox live, this paper would focus only on those that are pivotal in supporting this community.

Members' profiles could be clearly implied from 'Zones'. The participants are both recreational and extensive gamers. While 'Pro' and 'Underground' zone players participate to evolve, get recognized and co-ordinate with other expert players, 'Recreation' and 'Family' players participate to connect and share good times with friends and family members.

People array different level of competencies in their contributions. Experienced Gamers are fluent with gaming jargon hence; they are the ones who contribute the most (Fig. 5). On a different scale, multiplayer gamers were found to be more focused more towards contributing to organization and management of team events through these forums whereas solo-players are the ones contributing to general forums. Participation is free and access is given to all participants for creating or



Figure 1: Gamer's profile depicting Gamertag, Rep Score, Gamerscore, Zone and Community User Level

replying to a post.

The design suggestions are organized into five distinct sections. First section is focused at startup challenges that a newly formed sub-community might face. The second section suggests ways to attract newcomers who would be beneficial to the community. Third section targets sustainability of the community by increasing individual's identity-based commitment. Fourth section looks at tools and practices that could foster peer-to-peer regulation within the community. The last section provides methodologies that could improve quality of an individual's contribution.

## Design Challenge 1: INVITING MEMBERS

### CHALLENGE

The Xbox community as a whole does not face any startup-related challenges however sub-communities pertaining to individual games and events might face problems with getting an initial boost. With every new game, there is an inherent need to get as many Xbox live members join the sub-community pertaining to that game. And this is not just with new games; any new gaming event hosted on Xbox live is likely to face the same problem. Hence, the challenge here involves leveraging broader community of Xbox Live to find suitable members for the sub-community. Ensuring participation in sub-communities would also make the broader community of Xbox Live sustainable over time. The following design suggestion provides justifications for its application to ensure participation during the early phase of a sub-community.

### SUGGESTION

For ensuring initial participation in newly formed sub-communities within Xbox live, design suggestion would be to deploy a recommender system for suggesting appropriate games and partners. This suggestion is in accordance with "design claim 10" (Ch. "Starting New Online Communities") made by Resnick et al. In particular, the purpose of this change is primarily to

carve out a niche for the community. This is imperative because the community lacks a mechanism for finding preferences of gamers and providing recommendations accordingly. Recommended content could be games, events, forums or partners for multi-player gaming. These recommendations could be built using user-user algorithm that would discover people with similar items (games played or events the participate in). Alternatively, we could also deploy an item-item algorithm where similarity between any two items (games, events) is proportional to number of common gamers. However for startups, user-user algorithm would be more relevant as there would not be enough users in a newly launched game sub-community. The criteria behind making these recommendations and further manipulation by users should be provided as it would vouch for algorithmic errors and nuance in people's preferences.

Implanting such a system would reduce the navigational cost ( $\text{navigation\_cost}$ ). The recommender system would allow gamers to find interesting content more efficiently. Hence, it would increase the net benefit for visiting that space ( $\text{match\_value} * \text{collection\_size} - \text{navigation\_cost}$ ). In turn, good experience with this system would also increase loyalty towards the community, as positive experiences with recommender system would build up more trust for the system.

This would also contribute in making community sustainable, as this system would continually provide relevant options to users for further explorations in gaming. Since these items would be matched to relevant people (hence increase  $\text{match\_value}$ ), it would also increase individual's contribution in the community (Design Claim 6). And lastly, it would be conducive to sales for Microsoft, as relevant marketing would be more effective than abstract marketing. Also, Advertisements through promoting games within recommendations would generate further revenue for the company. Hence, an effective recommender system is likely to have a positive influence on the community and also for the organization that owns it.

## Design Challenge 2: ATTRACTING NEWCOMERS

### CHALLENGE

Kraut and Resnick (Ch. “Dealing with Newcomers”) inform about benefits of inviting newcomers to the community. Newcomers are important for bringing new contributions, novel work techniques into the group. In case of Xbox live, recruiting new members would be essential for bringing in latest culture, new gaming strategies and new thoughts for improving the community with respect to other evolving competitors. The challenge here involves finding rich places from where newcomers could be recruited, determining incentives and also ensuring that newcomers are suitable for joining the community.

### SUGGESTION

One of the primary features missing in communal experience of Xbox live is its integration with popular communities such as Facebook and Twitter. Integration with these networks would favor recruiting of newcomers from social network of current members. Design claims 3 and 4 by Kraut et al. further testify this design suggestion. This would increase visibility of Xbox live within other social networks of gamers. It could also utilize knowledge of that person for identifying relevant people in their social network. Since this is a form of ‘Word of Mouth’ advertisement, turnovers would be higher than direct impersonal advertisement (Design Claim 2). It would also allow for sharing achievements, events, threads within these communities which would further popularity of Xbox Live within social networks of that person.

Also, All of the features on Xbox Live might not appear advantageous to newcomers within the community, as initially he/she would have fewer friends to share information with. Integration with popular social networks like Facebook, Twitter would allow newcomers to share their

achievements/activities with a larger audience.

Additionally, a unique requirement of the community is also to recruit members (who are already existing members of XBox Live) for sub-groups pertaining to different games. This could be achieved by following a similar approach, i.e., through promoting sharing of achievements or events specific to a game, with 'Friends' in XBox live. Recruiting could be a separate achievement for that game (with other game specific achievements) and therefore, it would serve as an incentive for increasing Gamerscore for that particular game.

Another design feature that could be inferred from the article by Kraut et al. is would be to have a reward structure for promoting referrals to friends of existing community members (Design Claim 16). In XBox Live, this reward structure could easily be put in place through existing mechanisms of reification. Participation of members in recruiting activities could be reflected their gamer profile (rep score, Community User Level) and thus, reward for them would be beneficial in increasing their reputation on XBox Live. This reward could also be extended to ensure that newcomers who are being recruited are suitable for the community. Mybrute.com deploys an interesting reward structure that ensures that the recruitments are not arbitrary. Here every 'Level-Up' of a brute adds one point to its recruiting brute. A similar structure could be established in XBox Live where every reputational level up would result in a nominal increase in the reputation score of the recruiter too. This would encourage participants to motivate rational people for joining XBox live group.



Figure 2: A typical MyBrute.com profile. Highlighted section represents an increase in score as a pupil just achieved a new level

## Design Challenge 3: INCREASING COMMITMENT

### CHALLENGE

Once it has been ensured through recruitment that there would be sufficient members present in the community, the next step is make certain that there would be enough participation and activities to keep it alive. It means that we need to ensure that members are committed towards Xbox Live and also towards each other. Ren et al. (Ch. “Encouraging Commitment in Online Communities) mention that there are two types of commitment that are necessary in an online community. Where identity-based commitment is crucial for creating a common feeling amongst group members and to help community for achieving its mission, bond-based commitment is necessary for ensuring that relationship between individuals is secured. Since most of the current Xbox Live features are focused only at increasing bonds-based commitment, there is an imperative need for increasing identity-based commitment of gamers. This commitment is essential for holding members and making people compliant with the norms. Hence the challenge here is to find appropriate methods that could be deployed to increase identity-based commitment.

### SUGGESTION

Design Claim 4 and 5 by Ren et al. talk about some of the brand elements that could be utilized to establish identity and increasing members’ identity-based commitment. Following these design claims, first suggestion would be to come up with a strong and bold tag line that clearly depicts purpose of Xbox Live community. Currently, this purpose is hazy as one might make multiple inferences about the community (is it gaming support?, console support group?, multiplayer gaming?). It is therefore essential to have a common tagline that could represent common interests of this community. Also, we could assign a common name to all the members. This

would be similar to the usage of ‘I am Mac’ or ‘I am PC’ by Apple and Microsoft. For Xbox Live, a possible identification could be ‘X-Gamer’. This would increase members’ affiliation with the community and increase their identity-based attachment.

Additionally, Design Claim 12 could also be referred for deriving strategies to increase identity-based commitment. Anonymous involvement within the forums (which does not exist currently) would moderate their individual distinctions. This could also be deployed in any of the multiplayer games on Xbox, where system could promote playing with anonymous or random members and also provides a platform for chat-rooms where disclosing identity would not be necessary for participation.



**Figure 3: The Playstation Network**

Competitor websites could also be leveraged for increasing identity based commitment amongst Xbox Live members. Design Claim 10 & 11 establish use of external groups that impose threats to the present community. In respect to Xbox live, the major competitor is the Playstation Network. Since community members in these groups are also potential partners for multiplayer gaming, a shift of members would result in less players available for pairing up in a multiplayer

games. The threat imposed by Playstation Network could be highlighted and communicated to members of Xbox Live. Lott and Lott (1965) suggest that external threat would lead to an increase in commitment towards the community, i.e. the identity based commitment. However as Ren et al. further explain that the threat has positive impact only on core members. Whereas, it would have a negative influence for peripheral members as it may easily motivate them to shift. It is therefore essential that these threats be publicized only to the core members of the community. For ex. In Xbox Live community, a threat from Playstation Network could be sent as a personal message to individuals with Community User Level 4 and 5 (1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest). It would motivate them to take necessary measures and put extra effort to overcome that threat.

## Design Challenge 4: BUILDING REGULATION

### CHALLENGE

With both recruitment and participation being ensured, the next step is to monitor and regulate these contributions. There are many potential threats to public forums present in Xbox Live that should be taken care of for ensuring no loss in individual productivity. The community is liable to be attacked by “Trollers” who gain satisfactions through impeding community’s growth. In Xbox Live either a professional troller could cause the trolling or it can also be caused by an existing member who might do it out of aggression caused due to failure in a game. The challenge here is to minimize participation of these trollers and reduce the impact of trolling activities on the community.

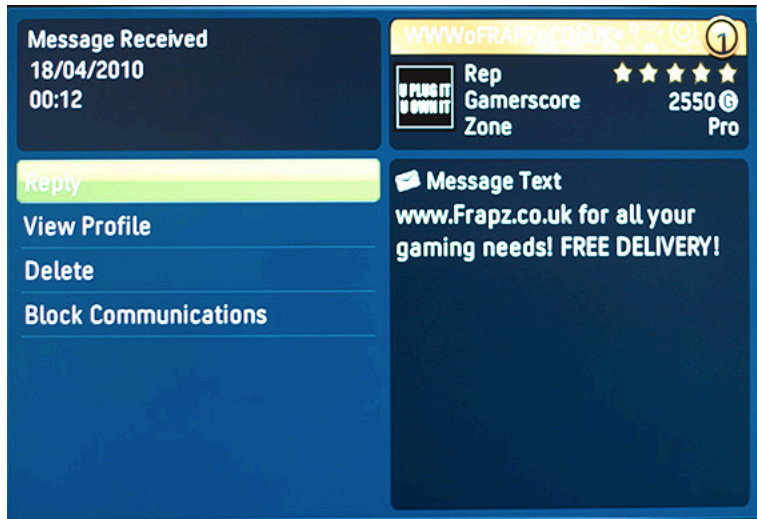


Figure 4: An example of spam on Xbox Live

#### SUGGESTION

A major suggestion to support regulation of activities in Xbox Live would be to make community norms salient and make them visible throughout the community. Design Claim 13 suggests that publicly displaying examples of appropriate behaviors is conducive to learning these norms and one's adherence to it. Since Xbox Live already have a method to publicize their popular gamers, their publicized profile can further enhance to depict their contribution to the forums while highlighting the appropriateness of these contributions. Further in accordance with Design Claim 14 & 15, a few inappropriate contributions could also be highlighted to depict examples of disruptive contributions for the community. According to Cialdini's focus theory, these publicized behaviors would be helpful for educating norms within the community.

Xbox Live might implement auto-detection of violations while making the post itself (Design Claim 32). However, since this group consists of highly liberal members, punishments should not be severe. An appropriate punishment here would be to negatively influence violator's reputational score and this affect could be predicted and shown in advance while the person is about to post the comment. This would impose authority in a way that both liberal and communist

values, as mentioned by Herring et al, are satiated.

Design claim 30 is particularly applicable for this community as a trolling activity by someone could be actively justified and supported by other members who share the same clan. There would not be any risks for these supporting members if the punishments were limited only to the person who made the original post. However, by forcing universal moderation and punishing supporters and clans that supported the trolling, we would be able to deter them from reinforcing a wrong behavior. Also as the clan's reputation is at stake here, fear of punishment might also lead to internal practices within the clans for controlling their aggression in forums. For example, they might start promoting norms for ignoring trolls caused by their own group members (Design Claim 7).

## Design Challenge 5: INCREASING CONTRIBUTIONS

### CHALLENGE

Regulatory activities do prevent inappropriate activities. However, it does not ensure quality of appropriate contributions. Improving contributions is a major task in Xbox Live as it is essential that people coming to the community do get the support they need. This can be ensured only when people capable of providing the support are identified and they have enough motivation for providing the support. Kraut and Resnick mention that there exist both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that could be utilized for making people contribute quality content. Hence, The challenge here is to take possible measures for ensuring valuable contribution and fair distribution of work.

## SUGGESTION

Xbox Live could provide functionalities that could match gamers with relevant tasks in the community (Design Claim 2). Hence, a gamer facing a certain problem could be matched to someone who had overcome this problem in a recent timeline. The system is already capable of recording user activities on Xbox Dashboard or even within a game and also allows for instant synchronous and asynchronous communications between any two members. Hence, implementing such a system would be feasible. Also, existing reward structures could be utilized for promoting this peer-to-peer support behavior (Design Claim 23). After resolution of an issue, help seeker could be asked to rate the help giver and this rating could be accounted for giver's "Community User Level". This type of peer-to-peer support system would be helpful, as the time for identifying a potential opportunity for contribution would be greatly reduced. A greater similarity of support needed with background of the person would also ensure the quality of support provided by him/her.

The second suggestion is an extension of design suggestion 6 mentioned by Kraut et al.(2008). The design claim implies that amount of contributions could be improved by highlight the benefits of making these contributions. Although this could be achieved by providing a prediction of increase in reputation score through posting a feedback, it might motivate some people to "game the system" and post content that would not contribute anything to the community. Hence, a better thought would be to highlight profiles of gamers with higher status (not exceptionally high) and show their timeline of how they evolved by contributing to the community. Even in reality, many players gain multiplayer gaming partners by establishing relationship through contributing in forums. Hence, spotlighting these players could provide a better representation of benefits for contribution.

## Conclusion

Although Xbox Live is built around underlying framework for multiplayer gaming communities like WoW, Half Life etc., the scope is not limited to a particular game or one distinct community. Structure of Xbox Live is built for providing a unified community experience for every game supported on Xbox platform. Hence, the size and dynamics of Xbox Live community provide an interesting opportunity for analyzing it through principles studied in their course. The community is unique in the way it supports a general community along with various interest-based sub-communities. Even though general community is mature and is nearly successful in dealing with challenges associated with a community, existing and newly evolving sub-communities are exposed to these threats at a greater level. Hence, the design suggestions presented in this paper are not only focused for improving the broader community but they are also extensible for maintaining sub-communities.

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