



CASE STUDY

# UNDERSTANDING USERS' PAIN POINTS AROUND ONLINE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

MARY HOYT KEARNS, JUNE 2023

# PROJECT SCOPE

## CLIENT

Social Media Company A (SMCA)

## TIMEFRAME

6 weeks

## MY ROLE

Lead UX Researcher

## METHODS

Literature review, Survey

## TEAM

I consulted with UX research managers, product managers, data scientists, and product designers across three different teams

## TOOLS

Qualtrics, SMCA's proprietary survey platform and data wrangling tools (based on SQL and R), SPSS, Google Sheets

## SAMPLE

571 SMCA users in the US and Canada  
Young adults (n= 231) and older adults (n = 340)  
Infrequent users (n = 258) and non-infrequent users (n = 313)

# STUDY TIMELINE

KICKOFF  
MEETING

SURVEY  
DEVELOPMENT

DATA  
ANALYSIS

WEEK  
ONE

WEEK  
TWO

WEEK  
THREE

WEEK  
FOUR

WEEK  
FIVE

WEEK  
SIX

LITERATURE  
REVIEW

FIELD  
SURVEY

PRESENT  
FINAL REPORT



# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## BACKGROUND



Over the past three years, community participation, particularly around commenting, had declined dramatically. While some of this decline can be attributed to quantifiable app-related factors, the majority of the decrease was unexplained.

## NOTES

Several previous qualitative studies conducted by SCMA found that many of their users, particularly young adults and infrequent users, were experiencing a variety of technical and emotional barriers and pain points related to usage of the platform.

## OBJECTIVES

This study sought to size the frequency of technical and emotional barriers and pain points, in order to better support product strategy around community participation for infrequent users and young adults.



# FINDINGS + RECOMMENDATIONS

## FINDINGS

While the majority of all respondents are satisfied with their experience in their online communities, and reported very few barriers to participation (especially young adults).

The most frequently cited concern, for all cohorts, was being judged for expressing their opinions. And, the biggest concern for young adults was people not responding to, or caring about, their posts.

## IMPACT

My recommendations were used to inform immediate product changes, including use of AI-assisted comment suggestions to encourage community member engagement. The findings also provided survey questions to be used in a long-term pain points tracking study.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage community admins to support infrequent posters by boosting their posts to make them more visible to the community, and educate them on how to create an environment of safety to allow for users' authentic expression.
- Utilize AI to surface "lonely" posts within communities, particularly those from young adults, to increase the likelihood of their receiving comments/reactions.

# REFLECTIONS

- Because this was an on-platform survey, it is not representative of the general population. However, we were only interested in the needs and pain points of current users.
- Self-selection bias is an inherent limitation in survey methodology.
- Participants were asked about their experiences with their most-frequently visited community (as defined by log data). Because it is likely that this is one of their favorite communities, it is not surprising that participants' tended to rate their experiences positively.
- Open-ended questions were not included in this study, leaving unanswered questions about pain points that were not explicitly mentioned in the questionnaire.
- Given the limitations of on-platform surveys in terms of number of questions that can be asked, we utilized multiple select ("select all") items, which supply binary answers. In future studies, it will be helpful to separate out each item and assess them as Likert-scale items in order to capture nuance.
- Distribution of responses for all the key survey items were greatly skewed, precluding the use of any advanced statistical analyses.
- We only surveyed participants in the US and Canada, so further research across global markets is recommended.



# CONTACT ME

[MARYHOYTKEARNS@GMAIL.COM](mailto:MARYHOYTKEARNS@GMAIL.COM)

[WWW.LINKEDIN.COM/IN/MARYHAK Kearns](http://WWW.LINKEDIN.COM/IN/MARYHAK Kearns)