

Writing Portfolio

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I.Blogs

Why should companies build a strong brand community?

What is a brand community?

Imagine cultivating a group of customers who follow you beyond the products you offer. These communities display brand loyalty at its finest! If people in your brand community are emotionally invested, they will invest financially too! Because of this, you can expect them to consume your content, tell family and friends all about it, and so much more.

But beware! Brand community is often confused with brand awareness.

Brand communities are the people who keep up with all your content on social media and share your products/services and content with others. In other words, they love seeing what your brand has to offer.

To put it simply, a brand community is a place for people who prioritize establishing an **emotional connection** to your brand and meaningful connections with other consumers who feel the same way.

What makes a great brand community?

A brand community is not a marketing strategy, but a business one. Thus, perception and value are more important to measuring its success than KPIs. Here are some key characteristics that make up a great brand community:

Engagement

Countless brands are jumping on the bandwagon of customer engagement, but few have a deep understanding of what it truly means to build an engaged community. Successful online communities don't just hold your hand through marketing campaigns — they offer immersive spaces for customers to connect and find solutions together with their followers or peers in real time. If you create this type of experience, then loyalty will follow without a doubt.

Collaboration

The internet is full of dead ends. Because of this, too often customers are left wanting answers about their most pressing questions and end up getting redirected for hours on end before finding what they're looking for - a very frustrating ordeal! A brand community with collaborative capabilities bridges that gap by allowing members to ask questions without feeling like you've wasted your time or theirs.

As much as asking questions is important, allowing customers to chip in and present their own ideas can also be incredibly beneficial for a brand. This is the case with LEGO and their collaboration efforts. Only a few brands have done it like them: [LEGO's online community](#) has long been a space where users can share ideas and engage with the brand in an interactive way. The content the company focuses on has two sides: First, users can suggest ideas to the community and the most innovative ones will get a chance to be featured in LEGO's newest product. Second, users can also share their own experiences and special memories with LEGO toys in the community, creating a space of inclusiveness and emotional connection to the brand. These types of exchanges allowed the company to experience incredible growth and a loyal customer base, as well as encouraging a direct point of contact between user and brand.

Personalization

The most successful brands know that a community is only as good as the people in it. By adding an AI-driven layer of personalized experience, each member will be able to have their needs met while being taken care of on a consistent basis - which means more value than ever before.

Over the last years, personalization has played a very big role in shaping brand communities through social commerce. [Companies such as GetBee are leading the way](#) and creating hyper personalized shopping experiences for customers around the world. Through their immersive video capabilities, GetBee allows shoppers to chat to a salesperson without having to step foot in a store. Because employees have the knowledge and expertise to guide customers through the virtual store, users feel more in control of their situation and most importantly, they feel valued and seen. Through this type of personalization, the brand is able to create a true loyal community that just keeps coming back for more!

Helpfulness

If you want to create a community around your brand, it's important that the ideas and beliefs behind it serve a purpose for customers. After all, if there isn't an issue or problem that needs to be solved for users, then what is the point of having the app in the first place?

Benefits of building a successful brand community

One of the best things about owning your [own community is that you'll have complete control over what content and visual identity](#) is presented to the public. This can also create a sense of exclusivity between a brand and its customers, just like if they were on subscription-based websites. Below are some of the key benefits of building a brand community:

Increased customer retention

Fostering your own brand community through apps is a great way to ensure that it will be used more often and for longer periods. When people are enthusiastic about what you're doing, they'll want other members in the group too - [this makes retention a cheaper alternative because there's less need for acquisition costs](#).

A great example of customer retention was seen in [Amity's partnership with True ID](#). By integrating engaging features into their platform such as Live Chats and Streaming, the company was able to get users to consistently access the app for entertainment, casual viewing, and much more. In the end, this alliance was a total success: Over 1 million messages were delivered per second, with loads more time spent in-app, and millions of users feeling the excitement of having a platform that they could go to every day. Users were encouraged to explore the brand and be a part of the community, making them ideal brand advocates.

Creation of valuable brand advocates

Sometimes it's hard to get the word out about your company. But what if you had an army for this? An online community of loyal followers who would always be ready to give you glowing reviews and positive feedback? Community members that would tell their friends all they know about your brand? This is why it's important to transform your community members into brand advocates – by doing this, they have the power to act

as a community megaphone and can influence others to enjoy your brand experience.

[For instance, implementing in-app social features such as in-app messaging and videos in your platform can help boost engagement.](#) In turn, this facilitates discussions between brands and users, and increases user-generated content. Let's face it: Your fans are the most valuable assets you have. They create authentic content that reduces scepticism, distrust and suspicion from new users - which means having them on your side is critical for building loyalty with everyone else.

My Starbucks, [Starbucks's online community](#), is a great example of a brand that has had great success in creating and maintaining valuable brand advocates. Their master tactic started out with only a few users, but evolved into one of their most cherished achievements – members can get the opportunity to have their ideas shared on the Starbucks blog and even earn money for their contributions. To grow their community even more, Starbucks gave prompt replies to customers on their online platform, thus enhancing engagement and loyalty to the brand. This is quite a lesson to learn, given that Starbucks has turned their online community into one of the most popular in the world!

Better customer experience

Online communities are a great way to get feedback from your customers and learn about their experiences. You can use this data as input for improving future customer interactions, which will make every interaction with the brand more enjoyable for everyone involved!

As a company that has always cared deeply about their customers, Apple's Support Communities is a space for feedback, self-service support and knowledge sharing that fuels engagement among its active fan base. As users share content to fuel discussions and interact with gamification that rewards positive contributions, the company has made it easier than ever before to improve their customer experience!

Added value for members

Customers can earn value not just from their purchase, but also from seeing what other people are saying about your products. Therefore, this enables them to make a more informed decision on your purchase, which in turns helps boost revenue and creates positive customer feedback.

For Airbnb, an online marketplace for booking accommodations founded in 2007, the company was able to provide their customers with value well beyond the initial purchase. One of the driving forces behind its enormous success is that it offers membership opportunities for hosts where they can provide tips and tricks to make the customer experience more enjoyable. Hosts can also connect guests with other people through social events organized locally or in an online space, as well as providing insight on what's going around town, so people don't have any surprises when traveling there.

Less dependence on ads

How did you make your most recent purchases from your favorite brands? Were you waiting for them to have a sale or waiting until you came across an ad? Most likely, you didn't. That's because we generally shop with brands, we have an emotional connection with, not because of discounts or flashing ads in our faces.

When you establish a strong online brand community, it draws people to your brand by tapping into what truly motivates them – their emotions.

User-generated content

Unfortunately, [marketers can never be authentic from their side of the conversation](#). Therefore, user-generated content is the best way to influence other people positively, increase your brand loyalty and help you attract new users. In a survey, 79% [of customers reported that UGC highly impacts their purchasing decision](#). At the end of the day, a successful brand community leverages this business strategy and realizes that, with UGC, users are more likely to trust the content and the brand as a whole.

A great example of this was seen in Amity's partnership with Perxhealth, a chronic condition management program, where Amity was able to provide the company with the opportunity to engage its users in a fun and interactive activity: ["Share a picture of your pet."](#) Perxhealth patients shared a picture of their dog or any other animal that had a unique connection to them using a Feed, and described how much these animals meant to them. Being able to involve something as special as a pet to the community saw many patients interacting on the platform and enjoying their time reaching out to others who were sharing similar experiences. This simple act got users motivated to keep using the platform, not because they saw an ad or marketing campaign, but because they had a

strong emotional connection to the community developed through user-generated content.

PR opportunities

If you're looking for ways to improve your company's public image, there are many good opportunities waiting. By posting interesting and engaging content on a popular forum (and making sure that it isn't just any old post), an organization can draw attention from all over the web! For example: go directly to community members or create campaigns with them where everyone works together as one cohesive unit towards something meaningful.

Why building your own brand community matters

We are all humans, and we cherish and value the same things. We all want to be seen, heard, and to be part of something bigger than ourselves. We are suckers for a larger cause and communities are at the forefront of what makes us the creatures that we are. By putting consistent community building efforts into your brand, nurturing it, giving it what it needs every single day, customers are more able to connect between each other and with people who share the same interests as them.

[As soon as your users get this connection, they can start engaging more with your platform](#) and become active brand advocates. Once you make this shift to your strategy (which, given the pace technology is evolving, it's better to start now!), you can expect great results, both for your users and your brand!

40 statistics you should know about online communities in 2022

As humans, we crave authentic and meaningful relationships. Whether talking to a close friend or bonding over a common interest in an online community, we find ways to be part of the world that surrounds us.

Over the past few years however, and especially due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we have turned to social media in order to feel more connected to others and to bridge the gap that was clearly imposed on us. However, this change hasn't come without its side effects – in a recent report, for example, about two-thirds of Americans (64%) say [social media have a mostly negative effect](#) on the way things are going in the country today.

To solve this challenge, online communities have stepped up to combat the negative effects of social media, leading many to adopt this new form of social interaction as their primary mode of communication and connection.

Therefore, how has this increase in demand affected businesses and users? What is the role that digital communities play in this new age? And most importantly, how have people adapted and interacted with others when faced with such a big shift as a worldwide pandemic?

To get the answers to these questions, we have looked extensively at data, researching some key statistics and facts to uncover the full impact of online communities on our increasingly digital world.

Chapter 1: Online communities have stolen the spotlight

An online community can be anything from a sports group to a financial literacy course. Whatever the scenario, these communities help people feel supported and tied to a greater cause, thus driving greater user engagement and retention.

They are also very effective ways for brands and businesses to showcase their products and services to like-minded customers who are more willing to invest in what they are passionate about.

1. [76% of internet users participate in an online community](#). One study found that people participate in online communities that include blogs, forums, and/or vlogs across all devices.

2. These communities can be seen in many platforms such as Reddit, [which is home to more than 130,000 active communities \(subreddits\)](#).

3. Facebook is another popular platform, as [1.8 billion people](#) use its Groups every month, and more than half of all these people are members of five or more active groups.

4. Companies are also jumping on this trend – A Forrester report found that [60% of businesses](#) own a branded online community.

5. Participants in a recent study indicated that [over 30% of their organization's revenue](#) is influenced by their branded online community

6. On average, [larger companies](#) are more likely to have online communities than smaller companies—only 40% of small companies have an online community.

7. Finally, [making connections with other people who have similar interests \(66%\)](#) is one of the primary drivers behind why users engage in online communities

Chapter 2: Users are at the center of change

It is known that [customer expectations are on the rise](#) when it comes to online communities and people generally tend to look for advanced personalization. However, traditional social media platforms are not cutting it anymore—when interacting with these outlets, users find it challenging to be part of communities and groups that appeal to their specific needs and oftentimes experience potential drawbacks such as offensive language and low-quality content.

That is why with the rise of online communities, more people have been persuaded to join groups that enable them to create a true sense of belonging and togetherness.

8. Because of the increase in demand for online communities and shift in customer expectation, **64% of online community site visitors say** they're visiting those sites more often now than they did a couple of years ago

9. Even among internet users who haven't visited community sites recently, 7 in 10 of them are at least somewhat familiar with these platforms, a figure which rises to 77% for Millennials and Gen Z.

10. And what else brought about this rise in demand? A general discontent with traditional social media platforms certainly has played a role: **About two-thirds of Americans (64%) say social media have a mostly negative effect** on the way things are going in the country today.

11. According to a Statista survey conducted in August 2017, 71% of respondents had felt offended by posts, comments, or pictures they had seen on social media.

12. Most importantly, Gen Z in the U.S. trust community sites (48%) almost just as much as traditional news sources (51%), and notably more than social media sites (36%).

13. Finally, for the various reasons why people join online communities, e-commerce stands out as one of the primary ones: **According to a study,** 27.3% of customers use online communities in their internet buying decision making, while considering a product or service.

Chapter 3: Engagement is the name of the game

What makes for a successful online community? Among the many reasons why people join these communities, the main motivation is always to establish connection with others. Companies and organizations across different industries can leverage this opportunity to market their products

and services and create a real sense of belonging, instead of advertising to the masses through a traditional social media model.

14. From the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, [there was an 81% uptick in online community engagement.](#)

15. But who were the people who engaged the most? [The top audiences](#) engaging in online communities over the past year include customers (43%) and developers (12%).

16. Brand experience is also a big reason why users choose to engage in online communities – **82% of community site visitors said** [they would be welcoming of brands who choose to participate in communities:](#) people want to engage with the brand community and 4/5 are ready to immediately become a part of them.

17. What purpose are people trying to fulfill when interacting with an online community? – [77% and 66% of survey participants said they visit online communities](#) to discover new things and to connect with people who have similar interests, respectively.

18. Finally, online communities are the people's favorite – 36% of users prefer online communities because they believe that [they can have more meaningful and engaging conversations over there.](#)

Chapter 4: How do online communities benefit users?

There are countless benefits to being part of an online community. As humans who crave authentic connection, we can feel the benefits of being part of a group from the moment we join and get acquainted with the space.

19. [98% of people](#) who belong to an online group say they feel a sense of belonging to that group.

20. **91% of respondents said they have given some form of support** to others through a group or community during the pandemic. 86% have said they received some form of support from others.

21. 77% say the most important group **they are part of now operates online**.

22. 75% of respondents of branded communities agreed or strongly agreed that the community has **helped improve customer experience**.

But the positive effects don't end there—brands and companies have also greatly benefitted from the rise in online community engagement!

23. **88% of community professionals admit** to communities playing a critical role in achieving their company's mission, and **64%** admit that online communities have helped them improve business decision-making.

24. **An online community can help organizations** improve engagement by up to 21%.

25. 57% of those with a branded community **said that the community has led to an increase in brand SEO**.

26. **90% of communities** say that suggestions from the community have been used to improve products or services.

Chapter 5: Post-pandemic, online communities grow stronger

If the pandemic taught us anything, it is that we must rely on communities for our share of belongingness and wellbeing. After this dramatic shift in everyday life, companies of all sizes started to create their own online communities to adapt to the rising levels of customer expectation.

27. Thanks in a large part to the visibility of online communities driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, 83% of executives have a positive perception of community potential.

28. 56% of professionals say their organization's leadership view community as more essential since the start of the pandemic.

29. 71% of communities saw their visibility increase over the last two years, 67% of them with an added increase in urgency: the COVID-19 pandemic, tipped branded online communities from a nice-to-have to a must-have.

30. As a result of the pandemic, 74% of community programs reported an increased recognition of their value – 62% of communities experienced an increase in engagement, with 17% of those **seeing a significant increase**.

31. In 2020, only 22% of community programs **reported having an Advanced Strategy**; in 2021 on the other hand, **37% of all communities reported having an Advanced Strategy**.

32. Finally, **31% of online communities** had a budget increase for 2020.

Chapter 6: A promising outlook for the next years

The importance, impact, and role of online communities has increased significantly over the past years and will continue to do so in 2022 and beyond.

33. New technologies are going to play a big role for online communities going forward—worldwide revenues for the artificial intelligence (AI) market, including software, hardware, and services, is forecast to grow 19.6% year over year in 2022 to \$432.8 billion.

34. Online communities are growing, and fast! Revenues from the internet communities market was estimated to have a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 24.3%: revenue increases 1/4 times every year.

Companies and organizations are now more aware of customers' needs and are working to provide the next generation of digital engagement. For these businesses, the future will present many opportunities when it comes to online communities.

35. [41% of communities have](#) 2-5 full-time people on their teams working on developing and improving engagement, which is a signal that communities are growing in importance.

37. Another sign of maturity is that [88% of organizations](#) have at least one dedicated community manager.

37. [65% of professionals say that the budget](#) for communities over the next years will see an increase.

38. [77% of companies believe](#) that online communities would help them improve their marketing for current and prospective customers

39. Findings from [Aberdeen's Customer Experience study](#) confirmed that 18% of companies plan to incorporate branded online communities within their activities and beyond.

40. In 2017, 28% of communities had existed for more than 5 years, and this number [has since grown to 49% \(2021\).](#)

The future is social and community-driven

What's to be expected for the world of online communities in 2022 and beyond? Judging from the statistics and numbers stated above, we can predict that they will play a vital role in improving user experience and brand to customer relationships – At Amity, we are committed to making this happen by creating positive digital experiences, and we believe that the future is social and community-driven.

The rise of digital communities: What role can they play in shaping businesses' strategies?

Digital communities have made a monumental success over the last two years, with open platforms ramping up millions of users from all across the globe. However, despite these huge numbers, business strategies are not relying on the full potential of such connections and, as a result, people often end up with a certain level of engagement that is, at best, superficial. In the next 5 years and beyond, I believe that digital communities will play different roles in the reorientation of businesses' strategies towards the implementation of experiences that are memorable and most importantly, authentic.

So, what are these roles? Firstly, digital communities have inaugurated a new media opportunity for companies and brands, as the old media systems such as TV commercials and print ads cannot create a true engagement with customers anymore. Since being connected to a community and feeling like you are part of something bigger is a basic human need, this new form of engagement becomes even more vital to reach a certain audience. By adopting digital communities as a business strategy, companies like Amity are enabling companies to create a shared and democratic space in which the relationship to users occurs on a more horizontal level.

Secondly, because people join digital communities to interact with others who share similar interests, these platforms naturally tend to represent a more homogenous group of individuals who are united by a common goal. This unity could manifest itself in many ways such as a love for cooking, an eagerness to be active, or an ambition to be a better investor. Regardless of the topic that binds people together, digital communities are a huge opportunity for companies to bring a more direct and captivating message to their customers. That is, instead of communicating a broad message to a wider public, in a digital community, businesses have the opportunity to direct that message to a public that is not only narrower, but also more captivated by the topic at hand. The end result of this shift would characterize corporate messaging that is more focused, more assertive, and certainly more appealing to the target audience.

Finally, by creating a safe and inspiring space of interaction between users, digital communities can act as a strong source for capturing new consumers, as well as retaining old ones. In turn, this means that digital communities will present an opportunity for companies to increase loyalty and reduce churn rates. Based on decades of market-based research, we know that, in the long run, it is more profitable to maintain consumers than to gain new ones. This is indeed a big role that digital communities can play for businesses' strategies, an unrivalled opportunity to cultivate more permanent relationships with consumers.

I am a true believer that digital communities are the future for companies who want to create sustainable businesses with strong customer bonds. As Amity well put, "the future is social!"

II. Customer stories

BSW Health provides emotional support for patients through a prayer wall with Amity Social

BSW Health uses Amity Social to create a prayer wall for patients dealing with health challenges. By allowing people to support each other, the company is able to generate more engagement and create a community around healing and well-being.

As the largest not-for-profit healthcare system in Texas and one of the largest in the United States, Baylor Scott & White Health was born from the 2013 combination of Baylor Health Care System and Scott & White Healthcare. Today, Baylor Scott & White includes 52 hospitals, more than 800 patient care sites, more than 7,300 active physicians, over 49,000 employees and the Scott & White Health Plan.

Leveraging the power of communities to improve well-being

As trusted leaders, educators, and innovators in value-based care, BSW Health had their sights set on the opportunity to extend their programs beyond the walls and clinics of hospitals. From day one, the company knew that patients going into surgeries and procedures face major challenges, so they were searching for something that would make them feel less alone and distanced from others. The ultimate solution would, therefore, enable individuals to come together and support each other emotionally while being part of a healing community.

Taking care of patients through a prayer wall

Reflecting on this opportunity, BSW Health decided to partner with Amity by integrating Amity Social into their platform, both on web and mobile through react native.

By utilizing this module, the company was able to implement a feed so that users could post and send well wishes and prayers to patients and their close relatives, as well as those entering a procedure. Since the feed included messages from all other community members as well, users could interact with these posts and provide extra emotional support by sending likes, comments, and reactions. This implementation made patients feel like they belonged in the community and weren't going through their challenges alone. This benefit also had a spiral effect on all members of the BSW Health workforce, as doctors and staff could better care for their patients and make use of a more humanistic approach to their work.

The future of care: Creating a patient-centric strategy

We are proud to enable growing businesses with social, chat, video, and bot capabilities. Baylor Scott & White Health is focused on creating safe and private in-app communities for patients and users. With Amity Social Cloud, they are equipped with innovative social technologies that will help them reach their goals faster than ever!

DietDoctor empowers its customers and creates an engaged health community with Amity Social

DietDoctor uses Amity Social to engage its customers and create a health community for users to discuss their diet and nutrition goals and share their success stories with others. By providing a safe space for people to share their health journeys, the company benefits from greater customer engagement and retention.

DietDoctor is the world's leading low carb and keto site aiming to provide unbiased and evidence-based health information to empower people and their health. The company was founded in 2007 by Dr. Andreas Eenfeldt and now has more than 75,000 paying members from around the world.

Offering support and empowerment beyond the recipes

Regaining health in an unhealthy world requires thinking and acting differently. As a company that focuses on empowering people to be healthy and live their best lives, DietDoctor wanted to push the envelope and make sure that their customers were taking full advantage of their products. Therefore, they wanted a solution that would introduce the value of communities so that more people could join in and feel supported to share their stories in a safe space.

Creating informed health communities

Given this challenge, DietDoctor saw the opportunity to partner with Amity to create their own communities by adding social features into their platform.

With Amity Social, DietDoctor created a community labeled as “Connect” that comprised different Groups for users to explore and discuss key topics.

Offering more than 10 groups to their members thus far, users can join spaces where administrators share latest announcements and helpful information, others where they can share recipes, struggles, successes, and advice for fellow members, and even one where they can ask questions directly to Diet Doctor's medical experts.

For the Diet Doctor team, this is just the beginning. Britta Patterson – the Product Manager for Connect – stated:

“As we look to the future, we are planning to provide groups for our member programs, for specific regions or languages, and so much more. Once we build up the infrastructure for Connect, we aim to open up group creation to our members as well. We are excited to see what's to come!”

Expressing the love for a healthy diet

DietDoctor decided to take things a step further by implementing a Global Feed made of posts from all joined communities. Coming from a Facebook group community, they wanted to retain that feeling of a centralized community while still honoring the various paths their members take to reach unique health goals. With the Global feed, this could allow their members to join any group of their interest, but see posts from all groups they are a part of in one place.

Users could publish text and image posts, like and comment on other posts from different members, share links to posts, and save posts they wanted to keep for future reference. These changes allowed customers to express themselves, reach out to others who were going through similar situations, and feel supported to further develop their health and diet goals.

Inspiring people through dietary communities

Having just started growing their in-app community, Diet Doctor cannot wait to discover more ways that they can help their customers feel connected to one another with Amity Social. As they grow this community, they will be looking at combining Amity Social with other social features such as Chats, Videos, and Bots as the main driving force behind users' well-being and their ability to interact with others to get the most support

throughout their health and dietary journey. The future is social and Amity is looking forward to providing companies such as Diet Doctor with all the resources so that patients can feel encouraged to focus on their health and become active brand supporters!

Perxhealth revitalizes their health community by adding Amity Social and provides patients the support they deserve

Australian company Perxhealth uses Amity Social Cloud to future-proof their health communities and allows patients to connect with each other and share their treatment journeys. By interacting with a larger group, users are more likely to stick with their goals and feel supported, thus increasing in-app engagement and retention.

Perxhealth is known for its chronic condition management program that tracks treatment milestones and health tasks while providing a motivational community for everyone to share their treatment journey and develop more sustainable lifestyle habits. Users also earn monetary rewards through gift cards for completing their health tasks as needed.

Offering support beyond the program

Dealing with a chronic health condition is not easy and Perxhealth knew this from day one when setting up their strategy. Aside from their program developed to help patients keep track of their habits, the company was in need of a future-proof solution that would create further engagement and help people share and find comfort with others in a similar situation. Because their discussion forums on Android and iOS apps had limited features, Perxhealth wanted to focus on adding value through communities so that more people could join in and feel supported in their own journeys.

“We only had a small number of people engaging with the community in our app, so we wanted to find a new platform with features that would create more engagement in the long-term”

Melissa May, PerxHealth Product Manager

Cultivating better health through communities

Given this challenge, Perxhealth saw the opportunity to partner with Amity to create their own patient communities by adding social features into their app, making their platform a friendly space for patients.

By taking advantage of the company's gamification system, users could use Feeds to share their struggles with the greater community. For example, patients dealing with a certain condition could post updates about their health while others could react by sending likes and comments. They could even share recipes, nutritional advice, and other interesting health topics! Because of this opportunity, patients were more at ease and didn't feel like they were going through their condition alone. Already, this implementation increased the company's in-app engagement and motivated patients to stay strong and keep on top of their daily tasks.

Since Perxhealth already had a reward system in place (e.g. gift cards), the company customized their own gamification so that patients could share their achievements in the Feed and encourage others to be resilient in their journeys. Having something that patients could look forward to was a pivotal part of the company's success in creating better engagement and making sure that people felt more at ease.

Sharing the love for pets and healing

In integrating community features into their platform, Amity helped Perxhealth give to their patients even more by running a fun campaign: "Share a picture of your pet." Users could share a picture of their dog or any other animal that had a unique connection to them in the Feed and describe how much these animals meant to them. Being able to involve something as special as a pet to the community saw many patients interacting on the platform and enjoying their time reaching out to others who were sharing similar experiences.

"When we launched our new community with Amity, we prompted people to tell us about their pets and share a photo. It resulted in a great increase in engagement. We still get photos of pets to this day, it lifts people's moods!"

Melissa May, PerxHealth Product Manager

Moving towards a community-led health journey

Having just started growing their in-app community, Perxhealth already sees a massive improvement in engagement: In the first 2 months of integration, over 70% of users engaging in the community have interacted with it on a daily basis!

Given these achievements, Perxhealth is looking towards the future to be able to help their customers feel more connected and content with their situation. Other social features provided by Amity such as Chats, Videos, and Groups will act as the main driving force behind patients' well-being and their ability to interact with others to get the most support throughout their health journey. The future is social and Amity is looking forward to providing companies such as Perxhealth with all the resources so that patients can feel encouraged to focus on their health and become active brand supporters!

"We won't ever take away the community in our app. It compliments our company's mission and core product. This is a feature that will grow as people become more attached to it."

Melissa May, PerxHealth Product Manager

III. PR articles

FT 1000: Amity listed as one of Europe's fastest-growing companies

Amity has been named amongst the fastest growing companies in Europe, coming in at the top 150 in the Financial Times 1000 list. Amity ranks 132nd, and is 30th amongst the 155 listed UK companies, with an absolute growth rate of 1,020%.

We are incredibly proud to be recognized in the sixth annual [list](#) of FT 1000: Europe's fastest-growing companies. It's a reflection of the increasing relevance of our mission to create positive digital experiences and communities. It is also a testament to the hard work and incredible skill of our brilliant teams all over the world.

In their analysis of the rankings, the Financial Times and Statista noted that companies that made the cut this year were sufficiently resilient to survive and thrive with the collapse in demand due to last year's impact of the coronavirus. Technology leads the sectorial mix with a fifth of the companies on the list, followed by construction and retail. Italy is the country with the most entries on the list, followed by Germany and the United Kingdom.

This is Amity's first entry into the FT 1000 list and it comes after experiencing tremendous growth in the European and American markets, culminating in the [opening](#) of a new European HQ in Milan, Italy, earlier this year.

Francesca Gargaglia, Co-founder and COO of Amity, reflects on this great achievement.

"Being ranked as one of Europe's fastest-growing companies is something that we are incredibly proud of. This result is nothing more than the incredible hard work and dedication from all the employees across different departments, everyone at Amity has been involved in making this achievement a reality."

Looking towards the future, our plans are no less ambitious. We are just at the beginning of our journey. The opportunities are endless with many industries that have not yet had their social moment. We are seeing early adopters in selected industries, with clients transforming their products into social communities. As more and more product categories realize the power of social, we are aiming at even more rapid growth in the coming years.

"Our priority has always been to provide businesses with the tools to build the best digital community experiences possible. We strongly believe in the power of social and moving forward, more companies across industries will leverage social features on their own platforms to provide better experiences for their users."

Says Korawad Chearavanont, Founder and CEO of Amity.

Amity enables companies to transform their apps into vibrant digital communities through pre-built social features

Throughout the events of the last two years, companies have had to completely rethink how they interact with customers. From night to day, the entire world moved to digital for work, school, healthcare, shopping, and socializing. We aren't just in a significant period for digital transformation – we are entering a new digital era. This new wave that also incorporates aspects of decentralization and ownership of user data will be increasingly important, especially for companies who want to own the relationship with their customers.

As companies look for more meaningful ways to keep audiences engaged, the need to create an environment that is both personalized and social becomes more critical. Wireframing, designing, developing, deploying, marketing, and managing all of this functionality has many companies struggling to keep up. As the market is quickly shifting from standard advertisements on centralized social media platforms to user-driven content and communication features, it becomes evident that companies need to move quickly.

[Amity Social Cloud](#) is a solution for this exact problem. It allows any business to easily get digital communities up and running in a short time by implementing social features in a plug-and-play format. Furthermore, Amity offers the ability to fully customize every element of the social experience without the need for substantial engineering resources.

Co-founder and COO of Amity, Francesca Gargaglia comments on why companies are needing help creating an in-app social platform:

"The digital transformation is happening so quickly, and companies are struggling to catch up. From small and medium-sized businesses to large enterprises, they all have internal challenges of not having the right resources internally. Companies need support with creating personalized in-app social experiences that build loyalty and lasting relationships with their customers. The new digital era requires companies to not only meet consumers on the platforms they use every day, but also create a platform of their own."

The power of digital communities

[Amity](#) knows that the power of building strong digital communities through social features cannot be understated. Evidence suggests that people are more likely to buy from a company that builds digital communities around its users and enables consumers to interact and learn about products and solutions from other members of that community. This, in turn, can enable companies to be dynamic and adapt their strategies by analyzing what customers want from them and catering to suit these needs. The result of such changes allows companies to build long-lasting relationships with their customers, leading to a massive impact on the bottom line.

In a recent Amity survey, almost three-quarters (72%) of the people polled said they would be more likely to return to a brand that creates a strong digital community, while almost two-thirds (63%) admitted that they are more likely to buy from a company that leverages engaging social features on its app. Because of this, Amity is leading the way and providing companies with the ability to get closer to the people who are not only there to invest in products, but also follow company activity on a daily basis.

"We're the only company that currently offers a complete set of social features in an easy to integrate, scalable and customizable format. By combining our four products, Amity Social, Amity Chat, Amity Video, and Amity Bots, companies can build vibrant digital communities on their own platforms with features such as feeds, groups, profiles, and chat, which users know from the big centralized social media platforms," says Francesca Gargaglia.

IV. Mission statement

This text inspired the campaign for WELEDA Brazil, to celebrate its 100th anniversary: <https://www.weleda.com.br/>

People, flora, and fauna
Connected.
Interlinked.
Lives that pulse.
We are one world.

A vital bond.
With desire for love.
For respect.
For care.
Based on meaningful relationships.

Body, mind, and soul
Healthy.
Planet and people
In equilibrium.
We are one world.

Shared.
Blessed.
Sheltered by nature
That heals.
This is the essence
And compass.

Nature and us.
Us and nature.
In harmony
We are one world.

Weleda.
Connecting people and nature for 100 years.

V. Product releases

New Social Feature: Realtime Events

Engaging users and keeping them updated on the latest events is crucial to building a successful online community. Because of this, Amity now supports updating various models through real time events whenever there is a status change in either community events, posts, comments, and user events.

For example, whenever a user updates their profile, this can be reflected automatically in another user's device. This update will also be reflected in the same collection/community that the user is currently observing and participating in. Users can subscribe and unsubscribe to any particular topic to get updates, but they have to be a "member" of the community in order to perform these actions.

New Social Feature: @Mentions in Posts

@Mentions are an essential part of every social platform and we are now proud to release this new feature for text, image, video and file posts in global feeds, allowing users to feel more connected to their favorite communities.

Following our previous releases, this new social feature enables users to search the name of the person they want to mention and quickly notify them by tagging them on the global feed. Having Mentions as a social feature in your app can significantly increase your users' chances of being active on the platform and returning whenever they are tagged in a post.

VI. Social media captions

Diversity day (Linkedin)

We thrive through diversity! Regardless of background, everyone should feel supported in the modern workforce.

-

At Amity, our goal has always been to include everyone in the conversation, because more often than not, our differences are what make us so special and unique – and we're not just saying it, we are living it!

With 5 offices spread across the world, we are a diverse team of more than 20 nationalities, spanning 10 departments, and with hobbies that go from board games to travelling.

So we thought we could celebrate this International Diversity Day 2022 by showing some pictures of our incredible family!

Happy international diversity day to all!

#InternationalDiversityDay #CulturalDiversity #DiversityandInclusion
#Diversitymatters #Diversity

Mental health day (Linkedin)

Today, mental health disorders affect 13% of the world's population. A positive side effect was an increased awareness that mental health is just as important as physical health. 🧑‍🦰 ♀

There's still a lot to do, though, because the acceptance of mental health struggles is still a barrier for many across societies.

Taking part in the #MentalHealthAwarenessMonth, we want to raise awareness for this issue, starting from our company, our people, our community. 🌈 🌍

That's why, at a global level and in partnership with iStrong, Amity offers a company Employee Assistance Program called Amity Mind, with the aim of making mental wellbeing services accessible to all employees.

Mental health within corporations is not only about sharing positive messages and catchy headlines, it is about offering constant aid and support.

You can't create positive products and experiences for your customers if you don't start with your people's well-being. 💎

[#Community](#) [#People](#) [#Wellbeing](#) [#MentalHealth](#)

Hackathon (Linkedin)

47 hours of hacking + 72 fierce participants + 555 minutes of coaching sessions + 3.5 hours of pitches and demos + 14 fantastic product ideas = 1 epic FIERCEKATHON.

Amity's hackathon has come to an end and what a ride it has been! Congratulations to the Anti Social Club team for the amazing work and for bringing home the first place and prize!

Of course, we couldn't forget the other magnificent teams, some of them with added flair to their names like Pad-thai alla Carbonara, Water bear, and Old man's legacy.

During the three intense days, we were all blown away by the amount of creativity and effort from the Amity family, working from Bangkok all the way to Milan.

Finally, we would like to thank again @AWS for the partnership. We couldn't have done this without your amazing coaches!!

#Hackathon #Engineering #Technology #Teamwork #AmityFamily

Amity follower celebration (Linkedin)

Achievement unlocked: 10K followers and counting! 🏆 🙌

It's great to see that, in our way to help brands build positive digital communities, we are also building a powerful community on our own.

Amazing things lie ahead, so make sure to check our page and spread the word! 📱 🌍

Insurance industry (Linkedin)

#Insurance companies always say that the customer experience is a top priority. Yet, the #CX is often their weak point. 😬

-

The global #InsurTech market is projected to reach \$159 billion by 2030 and yet, sometimes, insurers still rely on outdated systems and approaches. 🚀 📈

Gen-Z customers are even willing to pay a premium to get a seamless, personalized and digital-first experience.

Stop considering your customers as accounts and turn them into a community, exploiting your digital channels to increase engagement, trust and satisfaction.

The future of insurance is community-driven.

What do you think? 😬💡

#CustomerExperience #Community #Mobile

VII. Poems

My garden, my grass

Grass is green in the house just beside mine
It grows fast and smells great
I wish I could touch it
Lay my face on it
And laugh while it tickles me

The neighbours are lovely people
Their garden is their child
Perhaps because they never had a child
All they know is the embrace of the grass
They sing happy birthday to it
Throw parties on it,
Even though everyone steps on it

I watch it from my bedroom window
I know that it must be synthetic
How can it be so damn shiny!
What a son these people have
I am starting to think this grass is human

What a body this grass has
This garden's eyes are mesmerizing
The greenest green I have ever seen
I grin at this green
So green that I sneeze in excitement
The snot that comes out of my nose
Is green, albeit darker than the garden
How unfortunate

I keep looking at this garden of Eden
These 50 square meters of pure bliss
Of pure purity and perfect humidity
Even the ants are throwing their own party
They've never seen a playground so lush

And now I am sad
Because in my house
There is no green grass
My toys are not green
They are black and grey
All I want to wear is green now

I beg my mother all the time
For all the green clothes
The green watches, green pants
Green underwear
I ask her to give me the green lights
So I can go to the shopping mall
To buy my green shoes

But no matter how much green I buy
It's never going to be the same
I still look at that garden with the same face
I love that grass, its perfection
It is so symmetrical and effortless

My adoration becomes my pain
And as I walk toward my neighbours' house
They look at me strangely
Ask me why I am all green
I say that I want to be all green
And that their garden is so beautiful
And that I wish I had or was that grass

They look at me in shock and laugh
They say that my house's garden has flowers
And theirs doesn't
They say my garden is pink and orange
They are wearing pink and orange
They say they want to have my garden
And I want to have theirs

We can't exchange gardens
That would be weird
So I walk back to my house
And look at my flowers

I see they are growing
My mother smiles at me
We are a happy family
Because we are not green
We are pink and orange

After some days pass
I go up to my mother
And tell her I want an orange sweater
Fall is coming and everything is turning orange
She gives me some money
I go out into the street
And everything looks familiar
I look inside of me,
Everything is colourful,
So I choose any colour I want.

My garden is growing, I pour water and lay in it every day.

By the pain in leaving

Follow me
But don't beg me to stay
Hold me
But don't beg me to stay

I hug and feel you against me
Come closer so I can be less far away
When this day is done
I hope to have enjoyed you
As much as you deserve

Goodbye now
Take my kiss
I have to go
But it hurts so much
It drains me
Like ripping open a wound
That gets cuts deeper
Every time I have to untether our love

My vision is distorted now that you're gone
I am not able anymore
To come into myself
I am lost in all that was left of us
When we close as one

Parting ways is hardest before
Parting ways is hard
And it never gets better
It's all I think about

But being with you for that one moment
When I am about to leave
When I am going into nothingness
This moment is my drug
The high before the fall

If I could pause us
For that one single look

If I could hold you
And you could hold all of me
So that this conjoined pain could drain away.

Orpheus' curse

And yet
You were there,
Through all the days and nights
That covered my twilight's dreams
And my quest
Which now brings us together
So that I can cherish and caress you
My dear Eurydice
With all my laughter of words.
But none of them could ever suffice
The fire to your heart
And desire to leave me out
Of your deep, cold world in underground
To that and to the hope
That I may have seemed to have
For no song or rhyme,
Lyre or verse
Could ever suffice
Your heart's desire
To dwell insufferably without mine.

VIII. Short stories

Back seat

Tall and dark he came to me, confused, holding a candle on his hand. Silly boy, he said, you shouldn't have come in here, the ceremony is just about to start. He told me to stay quiet and hold on to the lady next to me, she was scared and open eyed like a stray dog awaiting to cross a highway. I had to go back to my parents, so I came down from my seat, my legs tiny and frail, and ran away to the back of the building. My father would not let me go and guided me to an average-sized teenager playing with his hair. He seemed annoyed, like he was mad at something and nothing other people did could ever soothe him. I waved at him, and he waved back and he got down on his knees to meet my eyes and said, would you like to see something cool? And I said yes, so he showed me a deck of cards, a Tarot, and he said he would do a reading of my future. We ran to the outside of the building, my parents looking at us didn't care at this non stealthy exit. The teen looked at me like he had the secret of the universe in his eyes and then said, your future is uncertain, but you will find your way. You have your mother's eyes he said to me, and I felt this feeling in my stomach that I hadn't felt before. Is this how people feel when they are about to talk to a stranger or talk in front of many people? My future is uncertain. Standing up again, the teen left and I was still with my thoughts at the back of this building with a high tower and some sort of cross on top. I thought to myself how weird these people are in this town, much less charismatic than the town I passed by with my parents yesterday. I made a friend there and left him the next day because my parents said we had to go. I don't know why we are moving from one place to the other, it feels like one big vacation which is nice. I don't know where we'll end up, hopefully in a place with trees and a nice big house where I can play baseball with my dad. For now, it's moving, moving, sleeping in the car that has a big back seat for me. I've met so many people. They are all nice in their own way, except that lady I was seated with in the ceremony, she was weird. I miss home sometimes, the milk in the fridge that my mom gives me every morning. I decide to go back into the building and my mom tells me we have to go. That's a shame because I was just starting to like this building with the weird cross. The teen says bye to me and say bye back. I jump into the car in my back seat and close my eyes. I've never seen so much road in my life. So much cement. So many turns we've taken since leaving home. I ask my dad where we are going next and he

says he needs to look at the map. I'm sleepy so I close my eyes again. The car backs up into the road and I can feel the engine roaring, the motion taking my head back, I think I know where we are going next, but I can't tell anyone. For now, I like the shake of the car that makes me sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep. My dreams tell me a story of a man that is riding a horse, but his horse is being led by a carriage in front of him, he has no control of the horse. The poor horse is stuck, and so is the man. Sometimes I feel like the man in the dream. Sometimes, I am the horse in the dream. What would I do to be in the carriage leading the way.

The castle in Eldin

Act I

The castle in Eldin was old and unremarkable. The legend has it that every night, Princess Katherine waits for a lost wanderer on the top of the main staircase, who wants nothing with himself, to come and marry her, thus bonding them for eternity.

I frowned while remembering the tour guide giving his speech and pointing to the spot where thousands of “lost” men stood for a chance at destiny. Miriam politely asked me to retrieve her camera, where all the castle’s pictures were stored, as she seemed to get much more enjoyment out of the experience. She would look at me voyeuristically from time to time and I didn’t know what to make of it. Was it simply an act of kindness or just another princess waiting for redemption? I would have returned the look, but the woman was already caught up in emotive and flamboyant discourses on the city’s shops and diners. She came back to the princesses’ story which had already passed painfully through me several times.

“What a lonely world for a princess, it’s as if she is drowning in her own despair. I wonder what would happen if she eventually got married, think about it, the city would cry tears of joy, the legend would be fulfilled!”

“Miriam please, you know I don’t believe in these things. The last time you dragged me into a castle, things didn’t turn out quite as planned.”

“What _____ are _____ you...”

“Miriam, you know exactly what I’m referring to,” my eyes were filled with hope that she would stop the queries.

“Oh, oh that! That was nothing but a mere unfortunate turn of events James, a bad day, a lightning strike.” Miriam got back to her steady gaze as if trying to delicately impose her will.

“A bad day alright. When I banged my head on that miniscule doorway, I knew I wasn’t going to set foot on a historical landmark ever again. No, not a historical landmark, a dimly lit cave! I have you to thank for my concussion.”

My history lessons in college couldn’t have ever prepared me for such nonsense. Princess this, princess that, what had I gotten myself into with all these trips? Being the head of tourism, Miriam could hardly hold her excitement with every step in the Navinghale town. I was soon to discover another one of her poorly executed plans.

Act II

After exhausting our quota for shared meals in the city, Miriam decided we should visit her friend, an old acquaintance that also happened to be a psychic. She had developed her own practice of extorting people for their money and giving them false hopes of falling in love in the future. I had absolutely no recollection of this supposed visionary in the drama that was our lives, because as a couple, Miriam and I barely traded friendships. We had known each other for almost 20 years now and our personal lives remained hidden, as if we were oblivious to the fact that we were seeing other people in the occasional night away. This did not bother me however—I was starting to think this psychic friend would delusion us into believing in a parallel universe. The truth couldn't possibly hurt me.

We approached the house located in the southern banks of the river, a shabby construction made out of oak and mahogany. Someone must've heard our steps because we were nearly arriving at the front lawn and the main door opened, uncovering the silhouette of a thin elder. His eyes were bright blue, and he was dressed in a sandy button-down, with camouflaged buttons and a silk tie.

"Miriam? She told me you were coming. Don't get much visitors these days, well, never! It's the energy isn't it? I told her this psychic thing wasn't going to work, but she insisted. Watch out for the statues on your way in." The elderly man pulled out a cigarette and pointed with his foot to the inside of the house, holding the lighter in his hands.

Miriam and I walked in, the scent of candlelight hit me in an instant. My suspicions were true, Eldin's electric web hadn't stretched this far into the city. The house had a strange elegance to it, discounting the vast collection of Tarot cards in virtually every corner of the living room.

"Please, welcome, welcome. So good to see you Miriam and of course, James. I have a lot in store for both of you tonight. And so sorry for being so rude, please do sit down! The pillows are made by my aunt, she is wonderfully smart about these things." We proceeded to accommodate ourselves as the man poured a red liquid into a large jar that smelled almost too familiar. I gave it a soft gaze, not wanting to disturb the man, but to my disappointment, it was not cranberry juice.

"Sylvia, this is James. James, meet Sylvia."

I stretched my hand, but the lady was quite keen on pursuing the greeting with her lips.

"Fabulous to meet you James."

"You as well Sylvia." I delicately folded my shirt and placed my hand on Miriam's lap, a brief encounter with security.

"Now, before we move on, we have to do it like old times Miriam, we have to! I sense James is a sucker for psychics, am I right James? She laughed and held the red cup in her hand, waiting for me to return her excitement.

"Yes, I'm...well, I've never really done something like it. I much rather be honest, it messes with my conscience."

"No such thing James, no such thing! All you have to do is give me your hand and I'll read you with some cards. As simple as child's play James. Plus, wouldn't you want to know all that lies beneath that curly hair of yours, all the secrets, desires, repressed feelings? You won't regret it James!"

I looked at Miriam in desperation, trying to salvage the last hopes that the psychic would leave me alone. She returned the glance, same as always, but forced me to comply. She truly wanted to see beyond me, she was tired of this person I had become. I understood her longing and I stiffed my shoulders and mouth. There was a courage in me that got lost somewhere in the castle and now I had to salvage it. This psychic was nothing but a free comedy show.

"All right, all right, I give in. But please, do be gentle and don't believe that I'll confide in any way."

"Well alright then. Let us begin."

The room quickly got filled with candles from all areas of the world, I could hardly distinguish one from another. It was as if the smells had turned into one big cloud that was now making its way into my innocent nostrils. The psychic grabbed my hand and I felt her cold touch, which was quite surprising to me. She seemed like a person that wouldn't garner such a wintry feel given her excessive kindness towards Miriam and me.

"Now James, just close your eyes and begin to breathe. If anything comes up that scares you, keep going, we never want to stop in the middle of a reading. I see here from these two parallel lines that you want to have kids, but something stops you from it. Interesting, intriguing! It seems like something else is coming up for me...yes...I sense that you will have an encounter with someone." The woman held a steady gaze and then closed her eyes to feel an intense presence that filled the room. She would circulate the possibilities in her own mind, adventuring into James' soul without him having conscience of it.

"This encounter is with a woman, a beautiful woman. She is extending her hand to you, but you seem nervous, confused, you don't want to give in to temptation. Oh, and I see another woman, much older this one. She is standing beside you and calling you by another name, I think it's...Jemmy. Yes, it appears she is dressed in a white gown and is placing her hand on your shoulder, telling you that you'll be able to see her soon. It seems you

two are very close and that she parted ways with you when you were very little. Oh, terrible, terrible!"

My hands trembled and I immediately lost sight of the woman's incantation. "Stop it! Stop it now! This is nonsense, gibberish! Ah!!" I stood up and panted after what I had heard. Could it be my very own mother coming to see me? And what was the other woman doing there? I could hardly contain myself and threw one of the candles to the ground, bringing with it an old book of spells.

"James, calm down, calm down," said Miriam, grabbing my hand tightly.

"Remember what I said, you cannot stop the reading James! This will only bring less clarity to me and I won't be able to decipher you so easily."

"To hell with your clarity, do you think I give a damn?? Coming here, in this filthy, smoky house, I should've never agreed to this!!" I furiously glanced at everyone in the room, panted at Miriam, and rushed out of the door. The air was cold, and my breath filled my lungs to the brim.

"What a crazy woman, how could she intrude into my mind like that?" At that moment, I had discovered something that spawned a fury in me, a breach that leaked out with molten lava and that corroded my inner being. It was as if someone had incited something within me, a feeling, a sadness that had been tucked away for a long time. I often dreamt about my mother and if things could've gone differently, but those were only dreams. Now, they were brought to light, to the landscape of my poor mind that was tearing me into pieces.

"It was a spell, a fucking magician! How could a woman like that do this, what a fucking whore, what a cunt! Ahhhhhhh!!!"

I saw Miriam's shadow lurking behind me. She looked at me as if I were some sort of demented patient.

"James, calm down. She was just trying to help, it's her job! Aren't you enjoying our time together, why don't look at the bright side? If only you could be more understanding, maybe we could get through one day without having an argument!"

"You're telling me, you're telling me! I can't believe this Miriam. You know what? I'm sick of your complaints, of your mindless gossip, of your infatuation with everything that's mindless in this world. I'm done!" She stood there looking at me, with an expression that could hardly be recognized by anything other than despair.

"James please, let's just talk about it, please, James come back, Ja- "

"Try and find me Miriam, I'll be lost in Eldin, better yet, I'll be gone! I hope I never lay my eyes on you and that disgusting friend of yours." I turned my back on what was the beginning of a new phase. I wish I would've done it

sooner, I wish I'd let go of all the baggage that I carried, especially here in Eldin, what a miserable little town!

Act III

I had nowhere to go, the streets were my harbor. I followed the light that carried on for miles on the Kunacsson main road and stopped just short of a small sized bar. The place was filled with middle-aged men who looked like they had just come from a tough encounter with their wives themselves. They would shout at the top of their lungs and look at the table where a poker game was being played, one which you barely see the deck of cards due to an egregious amount of cigarette smoke. I found solace in that place, I felt something calling me towards it. It wasn't fate, but something bigger, something that tempted me to shed what had just happened to me, to vanquish what was left of my soul. And so, I took a couple of entrance steps, scouting the atmosphere of the rebellious reunion. A short, bearded man caught a glimpse of my arrival and spoke with a loud tone of voice, as if trying to communicate with an auditorily disabled person.

"Where you come from son? Looks like you just took a pounding, you could use some of Eldin's juice. I'll fix you some, what do you say?"

"Well, I'm not much a drinker, I...tend to stay low if you understand."

"Nonsense, nonsense! You see, we're all stragglers here, victims of life's demise. All of these sad motherfuckers you see in here, including me, we all just having fun, wasting life cause' it already wasted us! Now, I'll have Barry pour you a nice Islander rum."

"Sir, I don't, I really just want to sit down and- "

Before I could get another breath in, I had a glass in my hand and a party of forty waiting for the night to begin. Four to five hours went by and so did my consciousness. I had drunk more than I could ever account for and my hands were as numb as a rock. I could hardly tell what hour or what day it was, much less where I had ended up. I looked up, my body drained and sweating, and saw the sign at the top of the street: Oksaköo Road, North Eldin. How had I gone so far from that bar?

Rummaging the streets, I looked for familiar signs, but none came. My head was spinning and tilted, my body walking across the roads where cars would honk. I didn't hear any honk, not even a sliver of soberness was there to save me.

Almost coming to a full stop, I turned my head to the side and was shocked at what I just encountered: The castle of Eldin!

"Look at who it is, look at who it is! If it isn't kiss my ass, pardon for my smoothness, all mighty Castle of Eldin. Sorry to say this, but it looks like you've aged quite a bit since I last saw you." I laughed hysterically, throwing the bottle of rum to the ground and proceeding to enter the castle.

Two large columns stood at the main hall. Statues of lions and all sorts of wildlife surrounded them, facing me aggressively, making me pant while running around the hall interacting mindlessly with the figures as if they were the same stragglers from the bar that I had spent the night with. There was a strange eeriness about the castle, its walls, its magnificently overconstructed ceilings that stretched my neck. I was strangely enjoying the scenery, lurking in between the halls like a lost child, freeing myself from the past with Miriam, all I had lived through and seen. At that moment, there was nothing more to me than the echoes in the distance of the halls, the corridors filled with conquerors and kings who would've been very old by now. I sat in amazement and awe, laughing out loud, remembering the times I had been deprived of such visits to these landmarks by my very own conscience. Drunken as I was, any prejudice against Eldin and its history was lost in the grandiosity of the castle. A cold chill from a window above curved its way across my brow and suddenly, I was reminded of the old tale of Princess Katherine, how she would patiently wait in the early hours of the day for a lost wanderer to come and marry her, guiding them to eternity. I chuckled and loudly pronounced the princesses' name while pointing to the top of the fateful staircase where the legends drew their story from.

"Princess...Kath...Katherina...Katherine? Yes, I believe that is what you are called my dear. Now, listen here princess, I have had too much rum, so if you would just leave me to be now, that would be much appreciated. You see, I have a wife, but she left me that darn woman and now all I can think of is how much I hate her! I'm glad to call this castle my home now princess, for I will be spending the night here if you don't mind." I proceeded to sit down and close my eyes, resting my tired body on the ground and letting out a yawn that echoed to the top of the staircase.

"Hello fellow traveler," sounded a voice making its way down the stairs and reaching the bottom in a gentle fashion.

"What??"

"I see you have made yourself welcome, please do, it's a lovely castle isn't it?" I jumped out of the ground as if instantly regaining my soberness and stared at the staircase. My eyes couldn't make out a clear image, but as the voice took its shape, I snapped and shivered at what I had just seen: Princess Katherine herself! At that moment, I'd recall what that mad psychic was whispering to me, what she had proclaimed my faith to be. Was the princess a gateway to a bigger story or was this just my drunken imagination?

Act IV

"Would you please tell me what is going on?? Listen, listen! I just can't shake you out of my head now and I pretend to do so as quickly as I can. Do you hear me?" I got a sudden chill that started at my shoulders and made its way to my head. Her presence frightened me but ignited a part of my soul that had been lost for a long time, as if I had discovered a newfound curiosity for all things sacred. The castle now seemed to me as an invitation into my unconscious desires, repressed feelings that had been locked away.

"I am Princess Katherine. But I think you know that by now. I come searching for a maiden name, an honorable traveler that will take me with him into the depths of this Earth and to the next. I ask you, are you this traveler? The princesses' gaze shifted to one of utmost sincerity, her eyes illuminating a glow that were sure to ravage kindred souls.

"I am...I'm just a man. My name is James. James Walker. With regards to this traveler you speak of, I am sure you have the wrong person. You see, I am lost and need to head somewhere else. I better find Miriam. Oh God, Miriam! What have I done...stupid James! Look at me, drenched in rum and full of pity, what a disgrace!"

"Be calm James. I shall offer you something you certainly cannot refuse," said Princess Katherine. With a slight flicker of her wrist, the princess ignited a force unknown to man, casting a strong light at the other side of the hall next to the statues. Winds and mist circled into this light, which had now turned into a human shape, a shape which had familiar characteristics. The princess finished her motion and turned her pale features towards me. I was easily captivated by her graceful form. As the image took its shape and light powered the edges of its curvature, I was numbed by what had just appeared in front of me.

"Mother! Mother! Oh mother, is it you, is it really you mother?" My face screamed of agony and remorse. My heart had momentarily skipped, and my consciousness was now fully heightened.

"Hello my dear son. How I've missed you my boy. Come here, closer to me James, I want to see your face."

"Oh mother, if you only knew what my life has been. Miriam and I, we...I don't know what to do mother, I need your help! I desperately want my life back, I want things to be normal and I can't do that without you." I screamed of pain. The trenches of my soul ravaged like fire. I couldn't contain my tears as they dripped down my beaten face, I was in pure agony. Never had I felt this pain before, this longing to grab hold of my mother, to let go of my past. Her silhouette now seemed to me like a chance of survival, a way out of misery that had kept me in the dark for so long. Oh mother!

The princess watched carefully as the two exchanged emotions and raised her brow in a royal fashion.

"James, now listen carefully. If you wish to see your mother again, if you wish to have her at your disposal, you must succumb to my wish. You must make me your wife. Only then can you live eternally. Only then can I grant you this gift, your mother at your embrace." I watched her profess these words carefully and then shifted my focus to the ground beneath. There was nothing beyond this world that I wanted, except for Miriam. In fact, Miriam was my one true bond, but I was far too involved inside the castle. The situation had turned into a dream which took control of my fate, of my every decent attempt to fight back. I was utterly surrounded, mesmerized, deeply confronted by racing thoughts.

In an instant, my mother's image began to fade, and I made my way to the top of the staircase as if being guided by a higher power. Cold sweat permeated my chest, my heart beat to its own frantic rhythm. As I approached the princess, I could clearly witness her beauty. The graceful, yet powerful eyes, the pale skin, the slim eyebrows, a hint of cunning and a light touch of divinity. I had never seen something like it before. She stood there, silent, awaiting my flesh to grip her and unite us in eternal bond. As I moved forward one more step, I contemplated the depths of my being, what had it been to live in my body, to breathe the stale air of sorrow that had permeated me for most of my life. Good heavens! I was ready to proclaim this my fate, to be one with the castle and all its grandiosity. I was part of its history, the legions of kings, knights, and princesses stood mounted in reverie while I took one step forward to greet Princess Katherine.

"As above, so below. May all the forces and kings of Eldin unite us in eternal bond. May your spirit be set free and may you now roam the lands of Targson's Gate with me, as your loyal wife." The princess and I were engulfed in a swarm of cloud which took over the entire main hall. In an instant, my earthy being was transported to another cosmos, leaving nothing but the castle and its remains that echoed eerily throughout the halls.

Miriam stood at the edge of her seat on Oksaköo Road. Her face pale as day, knotting her fingers together, switching her feet, making her seem like a delusional servant to life's beating. She would stand as if looking for my presence, sensing a familiar voice, turning around in agony and exclaiming at the lost hope that permeated through her.

"He must be somewhere, I know it. I...I know it James. I'm sorry for treating you the way I did James," Miriam whispered to herself, looking at the ground hoping to find solace in each passing moment. For now, she was as part of the city as I was, wondering around Eldin with a heavy heart.

Act V

Stumbling around, Miriam passed by buildings and fortresses by the road. The great enchantments of Eldin, the magnificent tours that she had loved before were now a mere memory. The sun cracked open its wide reach, stretching far beyond the riverbanks, granting Miriam a moment of reflection. As she looked down, flustered, a sun beam caught her left eye which made her head turn. There it was, the Castle of Eldin in its pure form, untethered since I left its material form and now in full display for Miriam. Unsurprisingly, she chuckled at its sight and made her way into the main hall. The same statues of wildlife, mighty kings, and queens, kept their composure as the woman slowly trotted her way in. Her eyes glancing at the priceless paintings with a grin, a deep sight of regret, and loss.

"My eyes are made for one thing only," she said, clasping her hands together and shifting her gaze to the top of the hall. Sitting down by the fateful staircase where I had summoned eternal life, Miriam crouched and dropped her head to her knees. Her fate was nowhere to be seen, her face constipated with thoughts of remorse. Suddenly, a voice echoed from the top of the staircase, lifting Miriam of her feet and stretching her eyes in awareness.

"Dear traveler! Do you roam this castle in search of love?" Princess Katherine's bright light shone from a distant, yet approachable light.

"Who are you?? Oh my god! You are Princess Katherine! But...I thought you weren't real, I thought you were just a fantasy!" Miriam regained her consciousness, speaking with a lump in her throat.

"No, my dear, I am as clear as the bright sky, a vision made tangible by the gods of Eldin above. Now, what is your purpose here at Eldin's castle?"

"I am lost, I can't find James, my husband. He is gone and we parted ways in the most unfortunate circumstances! You see, he hates this town and was just fed up with his life, but I didn't know he was to leave me! Oh, how foolish I am!"

"I cannot tell you the whereabouts of your husband, but I can grant you an image that comes with one condition." Princess Katherine raises her hands once more, swirling her soft fingers in the air, creating an image out of dust and air that took its form. Her peaceful motion was concluded with a gentle blow, allowing the figure to come to full form at the center of the main hall. Miriam's expression shifted to one of amazement, and above all, relief.

"James! James! Is it really you James??" She ran across the hall and swung her arms around the figure but was met by an inconsistency. Realizing her

husband was not in his entirety, she turned to the princess with a furious glance.

"What have you done to James?? You tell me now you wicked witch!!"

"He decided for himself you see. Eternal life for an eternal bond. That was the deal." Princess Katherine looked at Miriam and gave a slight nod, leaning her body against the staircase.

"What deal??"

"I presented him a similar image, an image of his mother, and told him that he could see her again if he simply succumbed to my wish."

"What wish? What do you talk about?" Miriam's shoulder stood up in confusion.

"Haven't you heard the tales? I search for an eternal bond, a brave soul to join me at the table with all of Eldin's kings and queens."

"You took James! He is gone because of you!" Miriam pointed to the princess and threw herself out into the floor.

"If you wish to see your husband again, you must succumb to my wish. That is all I ask."

Miriam's thoughts raced across her head. Was James worth this sacrifice? She analyzed, studied all the possibilities in search for a clue, but not even her strong logical sense could get her out of the main hall. She'd seem to be glued to this idea, confronted with the possibility of seeing James again and forgiving him for all that had happened, for all that he had gone through. She looked at the candle lights all across the hall that were still burning with the same passion as they were when she first visited the castle, and this reminded her of the reason as to why they went on the trip. It had always been Miriam's choice, Miriam's decisions all over their relationship, as if she was controlling every move, every step in their journey. She had become obsessed with control, like she had been for her whole life. She sighed and cracked open her eyes with a newfound vision. Her legs, a most loyal companion in her voyages, led her to the direction of the princess, taking slow steps up the staircase. When she finally reached the top, the princess winked at her, sending ripples of nervousness and agitation all across Miriam's body.

"As above, so below. May all the forces and kings of Eldin unite us in eternal bond. May your spirit be set free and may you now roam the lands of Targson's Gate with me, as your loyal companion." Princess Katherine and Miriam suddenly disappeared, bringing with them all the spirits inside the castle. A void now stood at the top of staircase. It was early morning, and the birds started to make their way into the great hall, swerving their wings across the corridors, spreading their sounds to what was now a lifeless

castle. Time was to tell if that void would be filled and if Princess Katherine would return to her seat as a patient observer of the nightly skies in Eldin.

Act VI

It was mid-afternoon when Sylvia sat down in her chair and looked down at the table where Miriam and I had previously been seduced by her magic phrases. She bounced her head from side to side, her black hair wailing across her face in a dramatic fashion. Grabbing a cigarette pack from her pocket, she sank deeper into her chair and lit up the lighter close to her face. At that moment, a vision came to her, almost an awakening of sorts that she was all too familiar with. She recounted these psychic moments with great serenity, as if the future was to her readily available inside her mind. Glancing at the table once again, she smiled softly and took a large puff.

“And there they go, softly into the night, without no one ever knowing they were even here in this Earth. Everyone except for me. Enjoy the trip James and stay well Miriam.” She smiled once again. Sylvia knew a secret and wouldn’t share it with the world. Her friends that had gone to visit her were merely travelers awaiting their final destination. The vision given by the psychic was only a warning and perhaps, a gentle nod to life’s final encounter. Nonetheless, Sylvia stood still, embracing the moment and winking at the couple upstairs.

IX. Essays

The Diderot Effect and the Drum Major Instinct: That Which Feeds Us

Denis Diderot's life was falling off the wayside, his life steadily declining by his financial shortcomings. Despite the illustrious library in his house and his contributions to the Renaissance movement as one of the creators of the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot just couldn't get a tight grasp on good fortune. That was until the Russian empress Catherine the Great made Diderot an offer that he could not refuse—she would offer to buy his library for a good sum of money and in turn, the Renaissance writer would provide his services for the upkeep of the archives. Well, it was a win-win situation. The empress would benefit from a massive collection of archives and Diderot would be able to get his life back on track by gaining the financial stability that he so longed for.

But the story doesn't end there! Together with the purchase, empress Catherine gifted the writer with a beautiful robe that would be used in parties and social gatherings. Diderot quickly fell in love with this scarlet robe, he was magnetized by its color and radiance. It almost seemed too much for him! Perhaps, that is exactly what Diderot was thinking as he reflected on his other possessions in house and was disappointed in acknowledging that none of them were as glamorous as his gift from the empress. And so, Diderot did everything to match the robe he was just given. He spent countless money on beds, tables, bookstands, all in the hopes of fulfilling a desire, the desire to match the identity of the royal robe. Needless to say, Diderot fell into bankruptcy again.

This phenomenon is what we now call "The Diderot Effect" and its warning signs remain the same after more than 200 years of history—after the purchase of a new possession, we fall into an endless cycle of consumption in hopes of matching the identity of the previously purchased possession.

However, in all that this effect teaches us and in all of life for that matter, there is a deeper force that drives each of us, from the products that we consume to the identity we want to attain. This is where Martin Luther

King (once again!) enlightens us with his famous theory of “The Drum Major Instinct.”

Spoken at his sermon on Ebenezer Baptist Church in 1968, King sided with the psychoanalyst Alfred Adler in stating that the driving force in every human action has to do with the need for attention, the need for recognition. Well, in that sense, many of us end up in the endless Diderot loop in order to achieve some sense of identity which feeds our drum major instinct, we want to be center stage leading the band! Notwithstanding of the value or type of acquisition that we make, the drum major will always be there.

It is also true that this relationship between the Diderot Effect and the drum major instinct can have a lesser impact on people who do not view their consumption as a tool for external validation. While these individuals succumb to the famous Diderot cycle, they may not necessarily crave attention, but they are still tied to a sense of identity which fulfills alternative sources of recognition. That is, these people might be fulfilling a different instinct, perhaps one that relies more on internal satisfaction, but nonetheless, they are still being driven by major forces in the psychoanalytic realm (sex, libido, etc).

Has everyone seen the new Netflix documentary “The Social Dilemma?” I would somewhat agree with the main premise of this movie, but without steering away too much from the discussion, I believe that much like the Diderot Effect feeds into the drum major instinct, social media fuels our need to be center stage. Please welcome King once again! For in its basic formulas and binary algorithms, these social platforms end up hypnotizing us into posting our best picture on a bright sunny day. And to what purpose? Well of course, to lead and shine in front of the rest of the band.

There aren't many solutions against the Diderot-drum major cycle. Almost all of us succumb to the desire to renew our furniture when we move into a new apartment or revamp our wardrobe for the upcoming fall season in an attempt to be recognized. What we can do is take a big breath, stop, look, and analyse what we truly need in our lives. Maybe you're like me and do want attention, but you do it in ways that are less poignant. Perhaps buying a bicycle and cycling to work. Who knows. To pull a shameless plug from my last article, thinking outside the box usually does the trick.

The Myth of Sisyphus and Projections on Human Life

On a cold and rainy Saturday afternoon, whilst sitting at a bookstore, I began to turn the pages of Albert Camus' *"The Myth of Sisyphus."* At first, I thought Camus' writings would prove too much for me, but after a few read throughs, I found myself completely fascinated by his myth.

The Myth of Sisyphus, which is based on Greek mythology, delivers a powerful message that can be projected to various aspects of our lives. In the story, the main character Sisyphus defies the Gods and chains Death, so that no human needed to die. The Gods became very angry at Sisyphus, leading them to punish him for eternity. Sisyphus would have to push a rock up a mountain, only to find that when reaching the top of this mountain, the rock would roll back down, leading the character to repeat this action for eternity.

Throughout his essay, Camus describes Sisyphus as the absurd hero, an individual who hates Death and leads a life of torture and complete meaninglessness. But it is in the character's descent, to repeat his toil, that Camus is interested in. The philosopher argues that on this descent, Sisyphus realizes the extent of his reality and wretchedness, a torment that has no end. All that is left for him, all that is left in his soul, is to acknowledge his condition and the meaninglessness of his actions, leading him to achieve a state of acceptance. Or, as Camus puts it, "one must imagine Sisyphus happy."

There are several interpretations and points of view that could be taken from this myth. Many have argued, including Camus, that Sisyphus' torment represents the lives of factory and office workers who perform meaningless and repeated actions. Others conclude that Sisyphus illustrates the human condition, that is, the struggles that each of us have to face in our lives in order to achieve some sanity and happiness. I sympathize with both of these views and further justify on the relevance of this story.

Much like factory and office workers (which many of us are), repeated actions and behaviors often entail a large portion of our professional and personal lives. For example, my work as a movie theatre host requires me to carry trays of food and beverages up and down the stairs, often times for

hours on end. This is the meaningless and absurd condition that Camus referred to in his essay. However, just as going up and down the stairs constitutes this condition, so does rolling up a rock until reaching the top of the mountain. This labor, this fundamental struggle which we partake in cannot end, for without it, one cannot take pleasure in life's shining moments! It is by descending to push the rock up the hill again that each of us realizes that this is the life we have been given and that we cannot shy away from our obstacles. We cannot back down because there is always, always more road left to travel. We have to be as strong and resilient as Sisyphus, we have to be as willing to go ahead and journey through the toughest terrain. In that, which all of life revolves around, there is no light without darkness.

Keep on carrying that rock my friends...

The sensitive man

Sensitivity is a trait that has often been shunned in society. Mothers telling their children to stop crying, fathers dictating their son's career path, teachers telling their students to toughen up and do the work. The list on the imperatives people take to "correct" sensitivity is endless. This trait is, of course, experienced by both males and females. However, for the purposes of this article, I wish to talk about the sensitive man and the unique challenges that this two-word combination brings.

If we go all the way back to the industrial revolution, the leading countries in Europe and North America were experiencing a dramatic shift in work culture. As the decades went by, efficiency and productivity were slowly becoming a glorified asset in every industry. The worker who was able to produce the most in the least amount of time was heralded as the top employee. In Stalinist Russia for example, a miner named Alexey Stakhanov got awarded the highest orders from the Russian government for being the most efficient laborer. Meanwhile, those who weren't able to adhere to these new industrial standards were left behind. They couldn't keep up. Therefore, they lost their jobs. But the industrial revolution is not about people losing jobs is it? It's about the massive growth in employment and productivity. And here is where the issue lies. Because this new work culture became so demanding and bled into what we now call capitalism, many laborers had to fit into a mold that was certain to destroy them. Some of these men, as we see them today in big corporations and banks, do not have the appropriate character traits that allows them to sustain this type of work, namely, the constant occultation of sensitivity.

This revolution goes along with increasing market competition, which then gives way to more unreachable standards for many men, especially those who have high sensitivity. By a process of social acceptability and performance, many of us end up shaming males for not being in the same wavelength as the system itself. In other words, the system creates the stereotypical masculinity that defies any notion of sensitivity.

And what does this mean for the sensitive man? Well, if a society is built for maximum output and male-driven stoicism, the "softer" males will have a significantly harder experience in dealing with such a space. They will be forced to shut down and turn on their robotic functioning mode.

Sadly, many men today, even those in high white-collar positions, hide their sensitivity to achieve recognition and acceptance. Some even live their entire lives by ignoring their true nature because they never get the courage to speak out about their innermost desires. However, I do concur that honoring one's essence is very hard. Men have to understand that even if they are being dishonest with themselves, there is always an opportunity to change, however small or big that change might be.

Perhaps, the biggest piece of knowledge that I can bring to this discussion is that sensitivity does not equal weakness and lack of motivation! Through my insistence on therapeutic methods, I came to realize that what people assume is a hinderance to one's character, is actually a divine gift. No one better to exemplify this statement than the great artists of our time. From Franz Liszt's melodious concertos to Dream Theater's stunning lyricism, these patrons of creativity thrived, and continue to do so, by their willingness to explore sensitivity in a superbly productive manner. That is not to say that other professionals such as bankers or engineers should infuse these abstractive ideals to their professions. Instead, they should maintain the core attributes that allows them to succeed in these positions while leaving space for sensitivity to roam unguarded in the flowery fields of consciousness.

One brilliant example of how to create this balancing act is to actively engage in cognitive therapy! In a utopian society, all men (and women) should invest in therapy, but it is precisely the tough, emotionless, sturdy men that need it most, for the development of a man that is both stoic and sensitive is the progressive fuel needed to dismantle the systemic and socio-cultural masculine norms solidified throughout history.

Thank you for reading!
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