

Building a Local Community

Inquiry Methods and User Analysis

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Executive Summary

The intricacies of blending into a new community can be confusing. People moving into a new house often find it hard to adjust to the neighborhood. It is the goal of this research to identify methods people can use to better introduce themselves and maintain a relationship with new neighbors to include any problems associated with the process.

The research objectives are:

- To understand how people feel when meeting new neighbors.
- To know the challenges and barriers of knowing neighbor's names and their contact information.
- To find out the strategies and tools used to remedy the challenges.

I started by observing someone new in his neighborhood. I had him recall activities associated with learning his new neighbors. It included reenactment using online tools to get information about new friends. The observation took place at his home.

The data collected revealed the following themes:

- Meeting people through others
- Making initial contact
- Online resources used

As a follow up to the observation, I conducted an interview with a participant who recently transferred to a new home. I was able to get the methods she used to get to know her neighbors and how she established friendship with them. The data I collected was in a form of an audio capture, transcribed and coded using an online coding tool (beta.saturateapp.com). I used the open coding method to group codes and refine the themes from the interview.

Here are the major themes that emerged:

- Technology can be a tool that can ease knowing neighbors.
- Benefits of knowing the neighbors outweigh fears and inhibition.
- The concept of "neighborhood" is not easy to define.
- Knowing new neighbors requires thinking and planning.
- Developing relationships with neighbors requires upkeep.
- People can get connected with others through people they already know.

From these I formulated the following hypotheses:

1. People will more likely to find friends in new communities if they are proficient with technology.
2. The benefits of knowing neighbors in a new community outweigh fears and inhibition.
3. People who have transferred residences before will have a better definition of community

The next thing I did was to create a survey to confirm these assumptions. My respondent requirement was straightforward. I recruited participants who have moved to a new community at least more than once in their lifetime and at 18 years of age and older. I sent out the survey link to my friends and family. They in turn shared the links to their friends using email and Facebook. I closed the survey after getting 70 respondents.

The result of the survey showed no relationship that skill in technology will promote its use to find new friends. Yet the survey results showed a medium effect size using Pearson Correlation to the premise that participants showing more emotions have a positive correlation (though weak) with the benefits of knowing their neighbors. I also found that the frequency of the move has a medium size correlation to the definition of what a neighborhood is. Definitely these two correlations will benefit with more structured research and investigation.

Here are the relevant data I gathered from the 70 survey respondents:

On technology:

- Sixty seven respondents owned a smartphone.
- Sixty eight are members of a social media community
- Forty two said they will use technology to reach out and from them 57 participants will use email to reach out, 52 will use the smart phone and 44 people will use social media

On benefits of knowing the neighbors:

- More positive emotions prevailed when asked how they felt when they first met their neighbor. They are: curious, relaxed, happy, calm and excited in order of priority.
- Sixty said that a benefit of knowing their neighbors would allow them to alert authorities if there are trouble and 52 said to keep an eye out of your house when you are out.
- On activities that would help maintain good relationship: 62 said being aware of their surroundings as well as their neighbors tops the list, 53 said practice parking etiquette, 43 will put garbage out on the right day, and 42 will keep their yard and garden tidy.

I am satisfied with my findings yet they need more work to afford better understanding on the intricacies of building a local community. I recommend a follow-up research with more intricate survey and focused interviews to build upon the correlations discovered here.

Survey

The focus of this survey was to understand how people can ease assimilation to their neighborhood. The goals of my survey was to gather information on how people feel when meeting new neighbors. It was also my intent to know the challenges of learning new neighbors. Finally this survey would assist in the discovery of strategies and tools that will provide solution to the challenge of knowing new neighbors.

Recruitment

The criteria I used was straightforward. I was looking for participants who have moved to a new community more than once in their lifetime and at least 18 years of age. I sent out the survey link to friends and family to share to their friends using email and Facebook and had it opened for a few days. I closed the survey after getting 70 respondents. All participants met the initial requirements.

Data Selection

It was my intent that these questions should provide significant findings on the following hypotheses:

1. People will more likely to find friends in new communities if they are proficient with technology.
2. The benefits of knowing neighbors in a new community outweigh fears and inhibition.
3. People who have transferred residences before will have a better definition of community

Summary of Responses

Here are the significant raw data gathered from the 70 participants.

Technology Background

- 67 owned a smartphone.
- 68 are members of a social media community
- When asked if they will use technology to reach out:
 - 42 said yes
 - 19 have not used technology
 - 9 are not sure if they will use technology
- The top three choices of technology respondents will use to reach out:
 - 57 will use email
 - 52 will use smart phone
 - 44 will use social media

Benefits of Knowing the Neighbors

- Emotions experienced when meeting neighbors for the first time:
 - 38 were curious
 - 33 were relaxed
 - 26 were happy

- 25 were calm
- 19 were excited
- 13 were shy
- 7 were anxious
- 2 were uncomfortable
- 1 was stressed
- When asked what the benefits of knowing their neighbors are
 - 60 said alert authorities if there are trouble
 - 52 said keep an eye out of your house when you are out
 - 20 said to check on you
 - 17 said to help move heavy items
 - 16 said provide emergency transportation
 - 15 said receive your packages
 - 13 said collect your mails on request
 - 9 said borrow items from
 - 4 to keep your spare key

Neighborhood Concept

- As to the definition of neighborhood:
 - 35 defined it as the people who live near one another or in a particular district or area
 - 34 said it is the surrounding area of their house
 - 28 said that it is the friendliness appropriate to a neighbor

Relationships Require Upkeep

- When asked to rate which opportunities of introducing themselves applied to them, the definitely will do's are the following:
 - 42 offer to lend a hand
 - 15 said to use their front yard, porch, or balcony
 - 14 said shake one hand a week
 - 11 said celebrate national neighborhood day
 - 8 said join (or start) a local meetup group
 - 7 will host a neighborhood cocktail party
- When asked what activities would help maintain their relationship with neighbors:
 - 62 will be aware of surroundings as well as their neighbors
 - 53 said practice parking etiquette
 - 43 will put garbage out on the right day
 - 42 will keep your yard and garden tidy
 - 35 will consider your neighbors' lifestyle
 - 31 will help clear snow off their drive way
 - 28 will give them a heads up of any neighborhood news
 - 25 will be aware of shared walls
 - 22 will control their bonfire, barbecue or backyard fire
 - 22 said to control their dog
 - 14 will alert their neighbor to parties

Demographics

- How many times they have moved:
 - 49 said 1-2 times
 - 15 said 3-4 times
 - 6 said more than 5 times
- Their ages:
 - 31 are 49-55 year old
 - 22 are 56+ year old
 - 13 are 35-49 year old
 - 3 are 25-34 year old
 - 1 is 18-24 year old
- Their gender:
 - 59 are males
 - 9 are females
 - 2 preferred not to answer
- Marital statuses:
 - 62 are married
 - 3 are single
 - 2 are divorced
 - 2 separated
 - 1 is widowed

Procedure

It was my intent to investigate the themes of my study using questions that would provide significant findings on the following hypotheses I formulated:

1. People will more likely to find friends in new communities if they are proficient with technology.
2. The benefits of knowing neighbors in a new community outweigh fears and inhibition.
3. People who have transferred residences before will have a better definition of community.

The survey I created contained 19 questions categorized to five sections. I used multiple-choice multi select, multiple-choice single select, and Likert scales:

- Technology Background (6 questions)
- Benefits of Knowing the Neighbors (2 questions)
- Neighborhood Concept (3 questions)
- Relationships Require Upkeep (2 questions)
- Demographics (6 questions)

I used Google Form to setup the survey and ran it for three days. I closed the survey upon reaching seventy eligible respondents. I then started collating the results, captured the screenshot of the summary of response graphs and downloaded the Excel spreadsheet of the responses.

Analysis

Once I got the result, I started analyzing the survey answers and grouped them together by categories. I studied the analysis summary that Google Sheets produced and tried to make sense of what information the graphs offered. I then started to organize my data in Excel in preparation of using Pearson's correlation of coefficient to find out if there exist any correlation and if so, how big, how small or maybe non-existent.

Technology Result

I tried to correlate the time participants spend online that might influence them to thinking of reaching out to neighbors using technology. But the Pearson value I got is small, $r = -0.105142917557042$. Deducing, I say that for those who responded to this survey, participants spending more time online was not correlated with wanting to use technology to reach out, $r=0.11$, considered a small effect. My research has not proven my technology hypothesis to be true so

rejected. I think I could have a better result if I crafted my questions by focusing more to the participants' knowledge of technology and their intent on how useful it is for reaching out to new neighbors and even to the general public as a whole.

Benefits of Knowing the Neighbors Result

I wanted to see if there's a correlation between collated emotions and the benefits of knowing their neighbors bring. I found that $r = 0.358091699085661$. This represents a medium effect size. I can then say that for those who responded to this survey, participants showing more emotions correlated with the benefits of knowing their neighbors bring, $r=0.36$, considered a medium effect size. I cannot truly say that my research has proven the hypothesis true since the effect size is medium. Thus the need of further research on this subject.

Definition of Community Result

The variables that I attempted to tie together for this is the number of times they moved with respect to their definition of a neighborhood. I found that $r = 0.297841964046576$. Rounding off to 0.3 this appears to have a medium effect size. I can say then that for those who responded to this survey, the frequency of the move correlated with their definition of a neighborhood, $r=0.30$, considered a medium effect size. This too I cannot say that my research has proven the hypothesis true since the effect size is medium. This will also need further research.

Future Work

The findings above led me to believe that required future research to understand better the possible relationship is in order. There are potentials in finding out the rationale why strong positive emotions correlate with understanding the benefits of being a neighbor. Likewise I believe that the relationship between the more people move, the more is their appreciation on the term neighborhood merits further investigation on.

Appendix

Appendix A. Qualitative Work, a Reflection

What I appreciate most doing qualitative work is that it allowed me the researcher to explore my research topic using in depth analysis of collated and often unstructured data. I have to make makes use of many practical tools like observation, interviews, and content analysis through tagging, sorting and organization of information to make sense of what the problem is and to find possible solutions. I like how the class exercises order in this course made me to perform them. It allowed me to appreciate the interdependency of these approaches and allowed me to arrive to a well-crafted conclusion.

Observation. This can uncover information that needs no articulation. In my case, observing someone reenact activities he did when meeting new neighbors the first time gave me an insight on what body language and verbal approach used and a more realistic timeline of the activity. A drawback of this was that it can be expensive since it required placing in a researcher in the midst of the client environment. It entailed close coordination with the participant and the researcher.

And as a researcher I only can observe one subject at a time which can result to a low sample size. Hawthorne effect can also factor in which could skew the data gathered. Anyway observation should be at the start of all research especially if the requirements are not known at the beginning. Through observing subjects (may it be of them working in their office environment or just following them around), a researcher can definitely learn faster what activities the subjects are doing related to the research.

Interview. To me this was an intensive data gathering research tool that proved productive using the appropriate open ended questions related to the issues. My interview answered the “whys” of things happening when meeting new neighbors based on the subject’s point of view. In the interview with my subject, I realized that time management was important and having an organized set of questions necessary to have a successful interview in the allotted time. A drawback on this tool was that the participant may quibble and exaggerate. And just like observation, the researcher may be able to recruit a few participants resulting to a small sample size. I believe interviews could be a rich source of information especially if the person interviewed is a subject matter expert.

Focus Group. With a group of 8-10 participants, a focus group would allow the researcher gather information based on the interaction ensuing among them. The researcher can gather different and often varying viewpoints that if collated properly can reveal helpful information useful to the analysis. Focus group sessions must not only be once but followed up with at least a couple more until the exact problem or information identified. Focus groups can also be a rich source of possible solutions. Drawbacks include some people are more shy than others so their opinions are sometimes not heard. On the other hand, other people can be more verbal that only their thoughts prevail. Facilitating discussions can be a challenge. I have had experience with coming out of a focus group that I did not feel I was better off when I came in. Group think is hard to facilitate.

Finally, I have enjoyed every minute creating these assignments. I have learned a lot in applying the qualitative research as mentioned above and also have come to appreciate the quantitative work of survey at the end. Both qualitative and quantitative works can complement each other. I can say that I am more confident now to use these tools to the furtherance of my career.