

“What do you recommend a complete beginner like me to practice?”: Professional Self-Disclosure in an Online Community

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CSCW scholarship has previously addressed how professionals use digital technologies for learning and communication, but limited attention has been paid to professional self-disclosure on social media. Acts of self-disclosure—intentionally revealing personal information to others—are often considered beneficial for communication and formation of relationships, and describing the role of disclosure in professional communication is important to advance CSCW research that focuses on occupations or organizational settings. In this paper, we present a mixed-methods study of professional self-disclosure in an online community focused on user experience design (UX), documenting how acts of self-disclosure may support professional development. We found that self-disclosure was frequently used as an effective rhetorical and content-focused strategy to provoke discussions and request assistance with the goal of developing or maintaining professional competence. Through the identification of these self-disclosure strategies, we discuss professional self-disclosure in relation to professional identity development in online communities.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Collaborative and social computing** → **Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing**

KEYWORDS

Professional community, creative class, professional self-disclosure, user experience design, UX

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1 INTRODUCTION

Computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW) has strong traditions in describing and developing computing systems that support professionals’ need to collaborate and communicate in organizational settings [40]. Research in this area increasingly focuses on how digital technologies—particularly social media platforms—extend professionals’ learning and communication activities within or beyond organizational settings [21,65,78,86]. However, these strands of literature have not adequately explored professionals’ self-disclosure in their online communication.

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Self-disclosure refers to *the act of revealing personal information to others* [51], and Joinson and Paine consider such acts to be intentional [50]. Scholarship of self-disclosure points to its many potential benefits such as social validation, self-clarification, and relationship development [20], as well as possible risks such as social rejection and loss of control [11]. Given the vital role of self-disclosure in online communication, CSCW scholars have previously explored self-disclosure in various contexts, such as personal negative experiences [4,5], health [8], and personal social media choice [63]. However, few studies have been conducted in the context of professional communication.

In this paper, we examine professional self-disclosure in a user experience (UX) community on the “/r/userexperience” subreddit. The community is dedicated to professional development in UX, including the sharing of design artifacts, identification of core UX knowledge, and the identification of pathways into the field. We investigate whether and how self-disclosure played a role in UX professionals’ online communication. Our guiding research questions are:

RQ1. What do UX professionals disclose about themselves in an online professional community?

RQ2. How does self-disclosure take place in posts and comments?

RQ3. How does self-disclosure support online professional communication?

By answering these research questions, our contributions are three-fold. First, we show connections between self-disclosure in online professional communication and professional development. Second, we contribute to research on online professional communities by investigating the content and strategies of UX professionals’ online communication, as well as presenting an in-depth analysis of the interrelationships between professional workers, occupational identity, and an online community. Third, we expand the online self-disclosure literature by examining professional self-disclosure that is currently underexplored.

2 USER EXPERIENCE (UX) AS A “SUPER-CREATIVE CORE” OCCUPATION

The “creative class,” according to social scientist Richard L. Florida, includes workers who “engage in complex problem solving that involves a great deal of independent judgment and requires high levels of education or human capital” [29]. Florida acknowledged new challenges facing creative professionals such as limited formal support for professional development, particularly as disciplines are rapidly emerging, evolving, and disappearing. In this paper, we consider user experience as one of these so-called “super-creative core” occupations with multiple distinct characteristics that have the potential to be relevant in contextualizing UX designers’ online professional communication and their disclosure behavior.

UX has come to prominence in the past decade, interesting both for its rising job demand [26] and the recognized strategic advantage it may bring to modern organizations [27]. Academic programs centered on UX education, certification, or training have begun to emerge in academic institutions [2,33,95]. However, even given these relationships with established academic fields, UX professionals face multiple and substantial challenges to their professional development. First, UX is highly interdisciplinary and draws from many disciplines such as computer science, engineering, psychology, and sociology [30], resulting in a volatile field that has yet to develop its own firm disciplinary boundaries and coherent body of knowledge. Studies of UX competence also reported that practitioners have not yet formed a definitive consensus regarding the nature of UX practice [42,58]. Consequently, UX newcomers face an indeterminate and continuously changing set of choices to start a UX career, and UX professionals face challenges in maintaining and developing design expertise [32]. Second, UX designers often work as a small group or as a

sole practitioner in organizations, taking on characteristics of what Muller and Carey consider a “minority discipline” [72]. As a result, UX designers may lack support from other teams in their own organizations and are frequently isolated from fellow UX practitioners who work in other organizations, even while they are expected to evangelize the value of design and user research. Third, although UX practices have begun to appear in organizations at different scales, this transition is never a smooth process. The organizational environments that UX professionals work within often harbor hostility and resistance to any forms of innovation [44,77], and remain reluctant to recognizing the legitimacy and utility of UX or design approaches [37,93].

Due to the evolving status of UX as a discipline and its relevance as a potentially new instance of “super-creative core” occupation, we position our work in this paper as one case of broader trends in distributed professional creative communication, in line with CSCW’s interests in online creative communication [52,62]. In particular, the indeterminate knowledge boundaries of UX, the challenging academic and competency-building conditions that impact the practice of UX designers, and the need for practitioners to engage their adaptive expertise that crosses multiple traditional disciplines makes this context for online communication of particular interest to CSCW scholars.

3 RELATED WORK

3.1 Self-Disclosure in Online Communication

Erving Goffman’s theory of self-presentation [34] has been widely used to examine the relation of identity to online communication. Drawing from dramaturgical analysis, Goffman proposed the “front stage,” where the performers, or individuals, selectively present information to the audiences, as well as the “back stage,” where performers prepare for their roles. In this sense, online spaces such as social media can be viewed as front stages where any human behavior is a form of performance that is viewed and assessed by the audiences.

Self-disclosure can aid individuals in achieving social goals such as self-expression, self-clarification, social validation, control, the development of relationships [3,7,12,20], and maintaining personal records on social media [94]. Social media platforms are also important venues where people can disclose negative experiences such as eating disorders [76] and sexual abuse [4] and receive social support [5]. When people experience major life changes such as gender transition [41], transition from military to civilian status [85], becoming a first generation college student [70], or residing in a new country [60], social media can provide useful tools for self-disclosure, identity development, and social support. However, self-disclosure is also associated with risks, including social rejection, betrayal, and discomfort for the audience [74]. For instance, Haimson et al. reported that disclosure of gender transition on Facebook has the potential to trigger both stress and support [41]. Vitak and Kim also found that Facebook users perceived risks associated with self-disclosure, including network regulation, targeted disclosure, self-censorship, and content regulation [94].

Self-disclosure strategies can be presented in various forms. One strategy is for users to carefully manage the information they wish to disclose. For example, DiMicco and Millen’s study of corporate employees’ impression management on Facebook indicated that as the use of Facebook began to permeate the workplace, their participants needed to negotiate their differing corporate and social identities on Facebook [22]. Ellison et al. found that in online dating sites, people craft their identities in profiles to create desired impressions, paying attention to small

cues [25]. When people regret their previous social media content, they start to edit or erase portions of their past history [84]. Recently, Ma et al. used mixed methods to examine Airbnb hosts' self-disclosure in their profile pages, and reported that hosts used multiple strategies ranging from long self-descriptions to speaking about a mix of topics to improve their trustworthiness [64]. Another strategy is to selectively disclose information to different audiences. Disclosers need to keep their audiences in mind when presenting themselves [79]. When individuals lack the ability or proper care in judging the potential audience, "face threats" would be more likely to appear [61]. Newman et al. showed how people disclosed health information in online health communities but not on Facebook to build a better, desired identity [73].

While the CSCW community has already accumulated rich knowledge of self-disclosure, to our best knowledge, there has not been work that focuses on self-disclosure in online communication about a professional topic.

3.2 Online Communication Supporting Professional Development

Initially introduced by Lave and Wenger to stress the idea of social learning [57], community of practice (CoP) has become a primary lens to examine online communities by CSCW researchers [28,65,96]. Online communities of practice are places where people with different levels of expertise can meet and collaborate. In CoP, newcomers are gradually enculturated into the community through legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), where newcomers first participate in low-level yet productive tasks that are peripheral but still necessary to a CoP. The dichotomy of social roles—amateur and professional—is often brought up as a marker of expertise. Through studies of "serious leisure" [90], Robert Stebbins discussed the social roles of serious amateurs and professionals, suggesting six attitudinal dimensions where these two social roles differ: confidence, perseverance, continuance, commitment, preparedness, and self-conception.

The CSCW community has sustained interest in how online communication practices might support professional development in various traditional occupations such as education [28] and medicine [39], as well as multiple emerging forms of work in domains such as crowd work [67] and the sharing economy [80]. The latter types of emerging work resonate with the notion of super-creative core work [29]. In relation to these new modes of work made possible through collaborative and social computing systems, various approaches and concepts have been proposed that have the potential to facilitate workers' professional development and empower them to develop and practice their skills. For example, Huang and colleagues promoted the idea of increasing social transparency between workers [45,46]; Suzuki et al. presented a system that enabled mentorship for newcomers to learn and grow skills [91]; and Hui et al. proposed the notion of distributed apprenticeship, meaning that online workplace communities could support novices to learn from distributed sources, similar to benefits of apprenticeship in offline settings [47]. Researchers have also explored how amateur designers seek inspiration and feedback through online creative communities, building both personal competence and indicating an interest in shared development of professional identity and work [48,65]. Increasingly, researchers in these spaces are interested in describing how workers come together as a global community of practice, supporting each other and forming a collective identity that transcends organizational or national boundaries. For example, Gray et al. found that workers were able to form a rich network of collaboration across organizations where they communicated with and supported each other's work [38]. Similarly, Salehi et al. demonstrated that workers could form

“tactical publics” that discussed and analyzed shared issues [83]. At the intersection of the lines of work on mechanisms of online communication for supporting professional development and the formation of professional online community, this study seeks to deepen understanding of professional online communication from the angle of disclosure.

Researchers have pointed to disclosure as an important dimension in interactions between professionals. For example, Marlow and Dabbish studied Dribbble, a graphic design community, and found that members attempted to receive attention from the community and develop their professional identity by strategically disclosing their work to particular groups of members [65]. Marlow et al.’s investigation of GitHub showed that people formed impressions based on others’ expertise and involvement in high-profile projects [66]. Smith’s case study found that creators would show their status through knowledge sharing and by mentioning other community members [88]. Online platforms such as Stack Overflow also use features such as badges to signify users’ expertise [35]. Different from this body of work exploring how platform features enable disclosure of expertise and work, our study focuses on professional self-disclosure in text-based communication.

4 STUDY DESIGN

4.1 The Online Community Under Study

In this paper, we focus on the “/r/userexperience” subreddit, a vibrant user experience (UX) design community on Reddit. Reddit, a pseudonymous online community, is among the most popular websites in the world by the time of this study [1], supporting millions of subreddits [81]. There is no mechanism for discovering and verifying a Reddit user’s real-life identity unless the user voluntarily discloses it. The “/r/userexperience” subreddit has been among the most active subreddits with a focus on user experience or interaction design, gathering people with varying levels of expertise who are interested in UX design. The community provides a venue for UX enthusiasts—both amateurs and professionals—to communicate, share their own design practices and knowledge, and critique others’ work [53]. At the time of writing, the community had existed for nine years, with 19,127 community members.

4.2 Data Collection

We retrieved threaded discussions on the subreddit through Reddit’s official API, and stored data in a local database. We captured posts and their associated comments, as well as their related metadata. For posts, the database contains the title, content, timestamp of creation, permanent link, number of comments, score, and user id. For comments, the database stores the content, timestamp of creation, score, and user id. Our data collection contains all the threads from January 19, 2016 to February 16, 2017. Our dataset contains 1790 unique posts, with their associated 11373 comments. 1967 authors made at least one post or one comment. Table 1 shows the basic descriptive statistics for the dataset. A score for a post or a comment is calculated based on the difference between upvotes and downvotes. While numerous perspectives on the meaning of a Reddit score exist, in this paper, we adopted the view that a post score is a common appraisal by the specific subreddit community, and used this score to ensure that our sample of the whole dataset was representative [69,87].

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the /r/userexperience dataset.

	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std.
# of comments per post	0	121	3.30	7.69
Post score	0	204	3.94	9.93
Comment score	-19	75	2.39	3.26

4.3 Data Analysis

To answer the three proposed research questions, we performed several phases of data analysis, using content analysis [56] and discourse analysis [32].

Phase 1: Identifying Posts with Self-Disclosure

During this phase, the primary task was to identify posts that included forms of disclosure out of the 1790 posts. By “posts with self-disclosure,” we only considered the content of a post, and not the comments of a post. Based on the definition of self-disclosure we adopted [51], we generated the following inclusion criteria for judging whether a post contained self-disclosure: First, the post must contain personal information that refers directly or indirectly to a specific person, such as the location of work and life, work experience, and job title. Second, the disclosed information must be about the poster, not other persons that the poster was referring to. Two researchers first independently evaluated ten posts, then discussed each post together to ensure their alignment of judgment. The two researchers then read through ten more posts together to verify their agreement. They quickly reached complete agreement upon the criteria for determining whether the information in a post constituted self-disclosure, indicating that this definition of self-disclosure was straightforward and actionable. Two researchers performed double-coding over all the 1790 posts to identify posts with self-disclosure. The coding results had high agreement (both identified 559 posts as containing self-disclosure, and disagreed over 10). After discussion to resolve disagreement, the final set of self-disclosing posts contained 568 posts, associated with 5047 comments. The final set of non-self-disclosure posts contained 1222 posts, associated with 6326 comments. Self-disclosing practices were common in this online design community, appearing in 31.7% of all posts.

Phase 2: Generating a Set of Comments for Coding

During this phase, the primary task was to generate a set of comments for later coding. Not knowing whether self-disclosing practice in *posts* would influence self-disclosing practice in *comments*, we decided to randomly select 100 self-disclosing posts and 100 non-self-disclosing posts, and code their associated comments. By comments, we mean all the replies and replies to replies that appeared under a post. We randomly identified 100 posts out of the set of 568 self-disclosing posts, and 100 posts out of the set of 1222 non-self-disclosing posts, with consideration of their distribution in terms of both number of comments per post and post score. (This paper is focused on the community level, and we consider these two criteria to be indicators of the subreddit community’s reception of a particular post.) We then combined the 200 posts and retrieved their associated 1504 comments into 1704 records in a random order for coding in Phase 3. The sample size is in a similar range with that in previous CSCW studies of disclosure on social media [5,76]. We randomized the posts and the comments and did not provide any indication of whether the item being coded was a post or comment to reduce the possibility of bias coders might have toward the content type.

In addition, to build a benchmark of the post topics related to UX, two researchers used content analysis [56] to code the 200 posts. Through a combination of inductive and deductive approaches, the researchers identified two dimensions of the topics: theme and purpose. Themes refer to the issues and concerns related to design work. We identified eight themes: *competency*, *collaboration*, *artifact*, *job*, *knowledge*, *product*, *socialization*, and *tool*. Purposes refer to the goal that the person created a post for, which was often stated clearly in the posts. We identified two purposes, where UX designers either *sought* and *shared* resources.

Phase 3: Identifying Self-Disclosure and Coding Types of Disclosed Information

The goal of Phase 3 was to both identify the records that contained self-disclosure as well as describe what types of information were disclosed. We adopted an inductive approach to develop a codebook for types of disclosed information. We first randomly selected 200 out of the 1704 records. Two coders who were familiar with the subreddit individually coded the first sample of 200 records, labeling each record with their individual understanding. After this process, the two coders sat together and discussed each code one-by-one to generate an initial codebook describing the types of disclosed information. The codes included: *academic background*, *professional background*, *employment information*, *biographical information*, *career plan*, and *self-perceived expertise*. We then went through an additional set of 50 records to verify consensus regarding the codebook.

With the initial codebook in hand, our next task was to code the remaining 1454 records. At this stage, to ease the coding process and minimize human errors that might be induced by tiredness and fatigue [24], we recruited three additional coders, resulting a team of four coders. (A coder in the earlier stage left due to work-related reasons.) The coders in a content analysis approach must have the necessary cognitive abilities as well as appropriate backgrounds [56]. In this study, the two former coders as well as the three new ones were all researchers from the same laboratory, experienced in research, and familiar with user experience design. To train the three new coders, we first sat together and coded 10 records together, making sure that they understood the coding interface and the categories in the initial codebook. Perhaps due to the clear distinction between different codes in the codebook, the new coders reported that they fully understood each code's meaning and distinction from one another. Each of them then coded a small sample of 10 more records, yielding satisfactory results.

Four coders then divided the rest of the records and coded individually. The coders were asked to remain sensitive to emergent themes that might be missed in the initial codebook. After all the coders finished coding, the leading researcher conducted confirmatory coding to verify all the codes. During this phase, two additional codes emerged: *workplace experience* and *emotional attachment*. In all, we identified 378 records containing self-disclosure, of which 100 were the original self-disclosing posts, and 278 were self-disclosing comments.

Phase 4: Examining the Context of Self-Disclosure

The goal of this phase was to develop a deep understanding of how and why members of the online community disclosed their information, as well as to describe how self-disclosure supported their online professional communication. During this phase, it was important to analyze each post and its associated comments together as a holistic narrative in order to understand the dynamics in the conversations. One researcher employed discourse analysis [32] to interpret the potential causes that resulted in self-disclosure, as well as the content and rhetorical strategies of self-disclosure used by interlocutors. The researcher also paid attention to

non-self-disclosing posts and comments to understand their relationship to self-disclosure within the full conversation thread. To be specific regarding the discourse analysis approach, the researcher used the “social languages tool” in the five theoretical tools for discourse analysis, representing our overall interest in describing the social relationships on the community level that may be inferred from individual posts and comments. The social languages tool suggests that “for any communication, ask how it uses words and grammatical structures to signal and enact a given social language. The communication may mix two or more social languages or switch between two or more. In turn, a social language may be composed of words or phrases from more than one language” [32]. This tool corresponds to the subreddit community as a professional community whose language is shaped by both an online context and a professional context.

Viewing disclosure in language as a conscious action, the researcher analyzed how disclosing comments functioned in a specific conversational context, paying close attention to how the disclosure was triggered by a previous utterance. This process required the researcher to connect the literal meaning of the language to their understanding of values and backgrounds associated with this professional community. Such analysis also included a coding process where the researcher labeled each disclosing utterance with an initial impression of the role of the disclosing utterance. After generating the initial code list, the researcher re-focused their analysis at a broader level, comparing and consolidating these initial codes. Through this process, the researcher also went back and forth between codes and data to ensure coherency and consistency. Eventually, we concluded that disclosure had five major functions in upholding professional communication: question answering, reciprocity, evidence-based reasoning, credibility adjusting, and empathy.

4.4 Researcher Reflexivity and Methodological Characteristics

Contemplating the methodological principles of positivist science regarding the separation between scientist and the subjects they study, Burawoy proposed a reflexive mode of science that embraces engagement with the study context as a path to knowledge [15]. Within this framing of research activity, methods such as participant observation and ethnography are premised upon our own understanding of and participation in the world we study, and entail multiple dialogues between social scientists and the people studied to uphold explanations of empirical phenomena. Therefore, we as researchers of sociotechnical phenomena must recognize our own positionality and subjectivity within the world(s) we study which inherently impact our understanding of the participants and artifacts we study. Multiple researchers in the HCI and CSCW communities have previously called for reflexivity [13,82] or have practiced reflective writing in their own work [18,23]. In the rest of this section, we document details of our engagement that are relevant to the research process, and discuss the impact of these details in relation to the present study.

While the specific dataset involved in this study is about professional communication of UX designers on the subreddit for a specific period of time, our engagement with this subreddit and the study of UX competency-building practices is substantially longer and deeper. First, one author has researched UX industry adoption and UX education, and has directed undergraduate and graduate UX programs in a large public university for multiple years, yielding a broad understanding of UX pedagogy, career paths, occupational socialization, and professional development. This knowledge and lived experience enabled us in our interpretive approach (using both content analysis and discourse analysis methods) to make connections between UX designers’ literal words in their online communication and hidden meanings and designers’

concerns about larger occupational issues. Second, the authors have investigated multiple social media platforms such as Reddit, Twitter, and Facebook in the context of professional online communication. This experience allowed us to be more sensitive to different affordances of platforms and how they might shape online communication. Third, we have observed designers' conversations for multiple years on this specific subreddit, constituting another source of contextual information about this specific online community with regard to its predispositions, values, norms, and conversational etiquettes.

5 FINDINGS

5.1 What do designers disclose about themselves?

We found that UX designers in the community disclosed ten types of information, all of which was centered on their UX competence (see Table 2).

The most prominent characteristic of self-disclosure in this UX community was a heavy focus on UX competence. Participants presented their expertise and skill by sharing their academic and professional background, employment, future career plans, and work.

Table 2. Types of information in self-disclosure in the online design community. Note: 1. Combined percentages are larger than 100% because one designer might disclose more than one type of information. 2. In the tenth type, we use “+” to refer to self-perceived high expertise, and “-” to refer to self-perceived low expertise. In some cases, they went one step further to disclose more personal information such as biographic information, emotional attachment with areas of expertise, personal connections, and self-learning. They also frequently indicated their self-perceived expertise.

Type of self-disclosure	Freq.	Example
1. <u>Academic background</u> , such as earned degree or certificate	P:41% C: 25.7%	I went to HCDE at UW, but spend some time at the iSchool, Design school, and engineering program.
2. <u>Professional background</u> , including information related to possessed skills and experiences	P:44% C: 31.3%	1. As a 20+ year UX Architect... 2. I am Javascript developer with 2 years of experience, and ...
3. <u>Employment info.</u> , such as occupational information	P: 27% C: 20.4%	In my 7 months of finding a UX position way too much douchey stuff happened, especially in Germany. The money I got offered was ridiculously low
4. <u>Biographic info.</u> , such as age, gender, and location	P: 8% C: 6.8%	1. What are your thoughts on this? I'm a 27 year old INFP 2. awh I'm in Boston.. so close
5. <u>Career plan</u> , or what they plan to do in the future	P: 29% C: 11.2%	looking to transition into UX, would you mind detailing how you managed to gain enough experience to make the switch
6. <u>Emotional Attachment</u> , expressing strong feelings for a subject matter	P: 8% C: 1.2%	but I have this preference because I didn't cut my teeth in a UX agency, and I'm an engineer at heart.

Type of self-disclosure	Freq.	Example
7. <u>Professional Connection</u> , concerning networking with professionals	P: 0% C: 0.6%	Lean UX is a great book. I read it and learned a lot. Full Disclosure: I've worked with one of the authors so I'm incredibly biased!
8. <u>Work-related</u> , such as communication with different design teams	P: 0% C: 2.2%	For most of us, there is no "regular" work day, just a day of work. Some days I spend more time designing, others more in meetings/planning/collaborating, and others coding up prototypes/micro-interactions. I typically work from 8am-4pm and do around 35-45hrs/week.
9. <u>Self-Learning Experience</u> , sharing personal stories of learning and improving	P: 0% C: 0.6%	I'm a part of a couple newsletters and a group on LinkedIn. It's sort of like having a magazine subscription. I read headlines and jump in if something interests me but I don't really go full throttle research on the next big thing.
10. <u>Self-Perceived Expertise</u> , self-assessed competency as low or high	P-: 32% P+: 4% C-: 7.8% C+: 16.4%	1. What do you recommend a complete beginner like me to practice? 2. 25+ years in the software industry in leadership roles as a developer, ux designer, ux researcher, and university HCI educator.

These types of self-disclosure have a remarkable discrepancy in their percentages. Several types of self-disclosure (types 1, 2, 3, 5, 10) had overall high frequencies (>20%), while the others (types 4, 6, 7, 8, 9) were less frequent (<10%). This is perhaps because the latter group was more intimate and less relevant in this community for representing or expressing one's competence. Self-disclosing posts were more likely to portray the author as having low expertise (32% in posts vs. 7.8% in comments), while comments were more likely to portray a high level of expertise (4% in posts versus 16.4% in comments).

The strong presence of competency-related self-disclosure resonates with previous literature around the social roles of amateurs and professionals as well as expertise growth [65]. Although Reddit does not provide much technical support for impression management as compared to technical communities such as GitHub [66], designers sought to show who they were and how experienced or skilled they were through professional communication. Such findings motivated us to investigate how this self-disclosure of UX competence was related to work in the online community.

5.2 How does self-disclosure take place?

In this sub-section, we focus on the discourse context of professional communication where self-disclosure takes place. We explore why and how designers disclose information to other community members.

5.2.1 How do designers disclose in posts?

UX designers' 200 posts revolved around eight themes with two explicit purposes. These pieces of information serve as a basis for understanding designers' disclosure. The 200 posts included eight primary themes:

Competency: ways to improve UX competency: e.g., *"Good resources for mastering visual design"*

Collaboration: experiences of collaborating with others: e.g., *"As a visual designer, how should I be collaborating with a UX consultant?"*

Artifact: artifacts created by community members: e.g., “I added new (ugly) filter buttons to an existing page (previously designed by a pro). Need help/advice.”

Job: job-related issues such as stipend in the UX industry: e.g., “Move to the Bay Area for a UX job? YES! ...if...”

Knowledge: UX design knowledge and trends: e.g., “22 Things New UX Designers Should know Before Entering the Workplace”

Product: the UX of popular products such as iPhone: e.g., “Taking a look at the iOS 10 lockscreen”

Socialization: networking with other UX designers: e.g., “UX/Dev Summit in Ft. Lauderdale early February 2016”

Tool: tools for making artifacts: e.g., “Anyone have a recommendation for a good, web-based card sorting tool?”

The purposes designers had for making these posts were clearly stated in the title or the content, where they either sought or shared resources regarding one of the eight themes. Resources refer to information about the industry, personal opinions about the theme, or personal experiences of making artifacts. Distribution of these themes and purposes is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of themes and purposes across 200 posts.

	Competency	Collaboration	Artifact	Job	Knowledge	Product	Socialization	Tool
Seeking and Disclosing	24	7	20	22	9	2	3	6
Sharing and Disclosing	0	0	2	3	1	1	0	0
Seeking w/o Disclosing	5	1	16	7	3	2	0	9
Sharing w/o Disclosing	8	0	5	2	22	11	1	8

As shown in Table 3, both disclosing and non-disclosing posts were distributed across the eight themes. However, the portion of self-disclosing posts in each theme is different. Self-disclosure had a stronger presence in themes more relevant to personal UX abilities or experiences such as competency, collaboration, artifact, job, and socialization. However, the proportion of self-disclosure in more “objective” themes was significantly lower. For example, the discussion of UX knowledge, popular products, and UX tools relies less on the disclosure of personal experiences, but more on references to a common understanding of UX.

Additionally, most disclosing posts were seeking resources, while in non-disclosing posts, both resource-seeking and resource-sharing occupied a substantial portion. Our observation of the posts suggests that, when people shared resources in the community to benefit others, such as sharing an external article about UX knowledge, the poster’s personal information was oftentimes irrelevant to the shared article. An example is:

Title: *Minimum Viable Usability Testing [shared URL]*

Content: [empty]

In non-disclosing posts, many instances of resource-sharing did not have any content but rather just a link to an external article. In contrast, for disclosing posts, self-disclosure was used to contextualize a resource request so that the community could easily identify the designers’ needs and provide relevant resources. Here is an example:

Title: Question about furthering my studies/landing a job

Content: *Hi, well I just graduated with an undergrad in Psych. I've been interested in the UX field for a while. At the moment im sort of stuck on how to proceed. I have a few options in mind for master programs, but I have also found a very enticing certificate program out of Cal State Fullerton for User experience. Do you guys think that I should go for a full masters degree or would the certificate program from Fullerton be enough to land a job within the field...*

When disclosing posts were intended to share resources, the discloser used disclosure to share their experiences without a specific purpose of requesting anything from the community. Here is an example:

Title: Frustrated - An interview I'm attending tomorrow is for a UI/UX "Web Developer"

Content: *As the title says, I'm attending an interview tomorrow, which the recruiter sold to me initially as a UI/UX position. I've since researched it, and it seems to be heavily involved in front-end development as well. Think angular.js, react etc... My frustration probably stems from the fact that, in Northern Ireland anyway, a pure UX job seems difficult to find. Job descriptions tend to be UX first, then a long list of things that you need to be able to do as well because they're not sure how they can justify a UX role that's only UX... I just can't comprehend how someone can put a job spec together and expect candidates to come forward for a role which is effectively three separate things... :-)*

In this example, the discloser was focused on detailing their personal experience with job searching and subsequent incidents. The discloser did not explicitly seek resources.

In sum, we found that strategies of self-disclosure in posts were relatively simply and uniform, where people presented their information in order to describe the difficulty or situation they were facing and solicited help in forms of information, knowledge, and opinion.

5.2.2 How do designers disclose in comments?

Our discourse analysis of disclosure in comments revealed that self-disclosure served as an integrative and indispensable part of professional communication. We observed that disclosure had five major functions in upholding professional communication: *question answering, reciprocity, evidence-based reasoning, credibility adjusting, and empathy.*

Question answering (24.6%) is the most basic type of disclosure where the discloser answered a question by sharing personal information. Here is a question & answer example:

Post title: *Are there any UI or UX designers here working freelance / Part time? If so, mind sharing how you do it?*

Post content: *... I wanted to ask whether there are any of you who are currently doing UI or UX on a freelance basis (Or part time)? ... Stay awesome people! :)*

Disclosing comment: *I'm working part time, but I'm also an intern, so I'm not sure my experience would be what you're looking for. If you have any questions you think I could answer, let me know though!*

In this category, disclosure often appeared as an answer to a question that requested other designers' personal experiences.

Reciprocity (26.1%) describes a scenario where disclosure emerged in accordance with the flow of professional conversation between two interlocutors. We observed two variations of reciprocity: First, the discloser disclosed in response to their interlocutor's disclosure. Second, the discloser asked a question that was answered by a second person, the discloser appreciated the latter's answer and disclosed more information. Here is an example for the first variation (we only show one example to save space):

1st disclosing comment: *Hey! Yeah they liked it because it covered some content we aren't getting at school and she was able to complete an additional portfolio piece. She did get a job after getting her portfolio online, but it's hard to say if GA was the reason. The majority of her portfolio is from our academic program and she's still taking classes while working. To sum it up, yes she got a job, but she's not a typical UX beginner.*

2nd disclosing comment: *Glad she got a job! That's good to hear. I'll have to look into it more. I'm a graphic designer looking to switch. I'm enrolled for DesignLab UXAcademy, but I'm worried the workload will be too much on top of a full time job. Thanks for the info though! :D*

In this example, the first interlocutor disclosed information about his wife. The second interlocutor acknowledged the first disclosure by saying “good to hear,” and then proceeded to disclose their own information. In this scenario, the second disclosure was not meant to answer any question, but rather functioned as a reciprocal act.

Evidence-based reasoning (27.5%) includes scenarios where disclosure served as evidence for the discloser to make a point about UX work. In this category, we observed four variations, including to support another interlocutor’s opinion, to oppose another interlocutor’s opinion by presenting a counterexample, to make recommendations drawing from personal experiences, and to reflect upon the UX industry. Here is an example of disclosure, making suggestions by using a personal example:

Post title: *Is having a Computer Science bachelors degree marketable to UI/UX design recruiters?*

Post content: *Hi everyone! I'm currently debating whether or not to pursue a computer science degree program along with an associates in graphic design towards obtaining a position in UI/UX design. How useful would having a computer science degree be in UI/UX?...*

Disclosing comment: *I have a computer science degree, did 5 years as a dev, then switched to UX. I am very marketable to the tech industry/complex applications/finance, basically anything that's not simple ecommerce or marketing (which would bore me to tears) websites because of the tech exp, and build environment experience... Scrum, understanding of good testing practise etc. A degree in it with no commercial tech experience would be more difficult if looking for a UX graduate training programme, but choose your industry carefully, and you shouldn't find it a burden, especially if you already understand and can demonstrate ux techniques/sense.*

In this example, the poster asked a yes-no question without explicitly soliciting disclosure. However, the discloser detailed their personal information to illustrate the point that the computer science degree is marketable. The phrase “very marketable” indicated the discloser’s confidence in themselves. Building on the disclosure, the discloser further discussed the value of having a degree and made several suggestions such as “choose your industry carefully.”

Credibility-adjusting (16.7%) is a context where disclosure did not serve as a necessary logical link, but rather a means of increasing or decreasing the credibility of the discloser’s opinion. Here is an example of increasing credibility:

Post title: *What does a good UX/UI Portfolio consist of?*

Post content: *I'm a recent graduate and looking for an entry level UX/UI Designer job. - What exactly should I have in my portfolio? - Is two full projects too little to have? - Is it okay for me to use Behance as my ePortfolio or is it necessary for me to have my own domain?*

Disclosing comment: *As a 20+ year UX Architect that's done my fair share of hiring. Show me the work. I want to see concept sketches, then wireframes, then something completed. I want to know you can think of a concept and get it to a completed state... Use a service like Behance,*

Dribbble, Carbonmade or others. No, you don't need your own domain. When looking at your resume and then your portfolio. I'm not going to judge you on where you have it. I am going to judge you based on what's in it.

In this instance, the discloser answered a question by first revealing their status as an old-timer in the industry (“20+ year UX architect” and “done my fair share of hiring”) and then gave suggestions. The disclosure did not add new content to the suggestions, but functioned to establish the discloser as a credible person on this topic.

Disclosure to lower credibility also existed in the design community. Here is an instance:

Post title: *Doing UX in foreign languages/cultures*

Post content: *... Does anyone in here have experience doing work with foreign organizations, especially in languages you don't speak and with cultures drastically different from your own? ...*

Disclosing comment: *I've been using this in a class. It seems reasonably comprehensive. <http://www.amazon.com/Handbook-Global-User-Research/dp/0123748526/>*

Warning: *I have no idea what I'm talking about. I'm just a student.*

Here the discloser stressed their status as a student so that the former comment was perhaps less credible. In this category, self-disclosure functioned as an adjuster, seeking to manage the imagined audience's expectation of the preceding suggestion (i.e., a user research handbook).

Empathy (5.1%) is a situation where people disclosed their own experiences, often negative ones such as frustrations and failures, to respond to others' disclosure of similar experiences. Here is an excerpt:

Post title: *2/2 ux interview fail, both companies stole & implemented my idea.*

Post content: *I wanted to work for 1 company, so I redesigned their first 2 pages, to show what I can do. They said they weren't hiring, but then they implemented ALL my changes (UX ideas) a month later, to their website. Just their top 2 pages. So obviously... Another company asked for a redesign of a problem they were having. Even asked for a prototype, of which I didn't do. But I did advise some basic heuristics, i.e. a cover photo with details of what it should entail. 2 weeks later, they changed their cover photo to just that... I'm new to design and with only 1 project in my portfolio, I'm not really sure of my options here. But this is not making me feel too optimistic.*

Disclosing comment: *This happened to me in Germany. In my 7 months of finding a UX position way too much douchey stuff happened, especially in Germany. The money I got offered was ridiculously low, even though I have a masters in HCI with some UX and stuff. 1800euro before taxes for a position in Hamburg or Stuttgart. and yes i could imagine a logo designer reporting this. i think a lot of companies see this as free work. :/*

In this example, the poster disclosed their negative experiences as well as personal frustrations on the forum. The discloser expressed empathy with the poster by disclosing a similar experience. In this case, disclosure was not intended to provide evidence or adjust credibility, but rather as a means of showing social support.

5.3 How does self-disclosure support online professional communication?

After investigating the detailed strategies that participants used to engage in self-disclosure in this design community, in this subsection, we explore how self-disclosure supported online professional communication. We use descriptive statistics in Table 4 to show this relationship. A Chi-Square test suggested that a disclosing post was significantly more likely to attract comments ($X^2 = 4.5041$; p -value = .033815). However, a Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test did not suggest significant difference regarding the number of comments a post could attract ($z = 1.07998$;

p-value = .14007). In our dataset the number of comments per non-disclosing post has a higher standard deviation. A close reading of non-disclosing posts with a high number of comments suggested that these posts typically contained a popular topic that many designers could relate to—based on their own experience—facilitating the generation of comments. For example, a non-disclosing post with 48 comments is entitled “ux impostor syndrome. What are your thoughts?”. Combining the results of these two statistical tests and later follow-up content analysis, we conjecture that disclosure in posts could attract more comments, but such an effect was mediated by topical popularity.

We further examined whether disclosing posts attracted disclosing comments. A Chi-Square test indicated that disclosing posts were significantly more likely to attract disclosing comments (X-squared = 12.2241; p-value = .000472.). A Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test similarly found that disclosing posts would attract a significantly higher number of disclosing comments ($z = 5.64301$; p-value < .00001) These two tests suggested that disclosing posts were more likely to attract disclosing comments, consistent with findings from prior disclosure research [9,19].

Table 4. Number of comments and disclosing comments for disclosing and non-disclosing posts.

	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std.
# of comments per disclosing post	0	32	4.13	6.41
# of comments per non-disclosing post	0	48	3.87	8.59
# of disclosing comments per disclosing post	0	16	2.12	2.82
# of disclosing comments per non-disclosing post	0	14	0.65	1.74

6 DISCUSSION

In this paper, we employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis to describe patterns of disclosure in the professional communication of UX designers. We showed that UX designers disclosed various types of personal information to support a range of types of conversations. Much disclosed information concerned UX competence, resonating with previous findings about the presentation of expertise and skill in online professional communities [65,66]. We suggested that in the context of professional online communication, disclosing posts seemed to attract more comments, echoing previous work on online communication [6,16,31,55]. Our discourse analysis of disclosure revealed deliberate, thoughtful use of disclosure to aid professional communication in the community. When examined in the context of intact conversations (i.e., posts + comments), disclosure was not an isolated speech act, but an integral part of the ongoing professional talk. When designers used disclosure to initiate a conversation, the purpose of disclosure was often explicit and easy to discern. In contrast, we observed various different functions of disclosure in comments to facilitate conversations. Next, we discuss how the specific professional context influences the disclosure practices, as well as how professional self-disclosure relates to Reddit’s platform affordances.

6.1 Professional Disclosure in a Pseudonymous Online Space

Different from prior literature on disclosure in everyday social media use [64,94], this study is grounded in an online professional context focused on knowledge sharing and professional development. While previous work on sensitive disclosure revealed patterns of disclosure that related to one’s personal identity [4,76], the personal information that people disclosed in this

community was primarily related to their professional identity, such as salary and workplace culture. Even personal information such as emotional attachment was generally associated with the user's professional work or experience, rather than their personal or social life.

In a community such as the subreddit under study, professionals seemingly have developed an ingrained set of attitudes and dispositions towards disclosure. While previous literature identified both social benefits and risks of disclosure [74], our study of self-disclosure in online professional communication showed that people seemed open and straightforward in sharing personal information relating to their professional identity. When users revealed their negative experiences and frustrations, they received various forms of social support such as reciprocal self-disclosure and empathy. It seems that in a quasi-professional space, worries about risks incurred by self-disclosure were not the primary reason for making disclosure-related decisions. Rather, the primary goal was to facilitate professional communication, emphasizing the pragmatic value of self-disclosure where UX designers believed that the benefits of disclosing outweighed the costs. Therefore, self-disclosure appeared as a useful strategy and acceptable practice for engagement in this professional community.

We conjecture that such disclosure practices were closely related to the pseudonymous nature of Reddit and the distinctive characteristics of the UX occupation. First, because of the pseudonymous nature of Reddit, we did not capture the real-life identity of the UX designers. In our dataset, we did not find any disclosing utterances that *directly* revealed real-life identities. Rather, UX designers focused on the disclosure of pieces of information that were relevant to specific discussion topics. They had control over whatever they wanted to disclose to an audience, not knowing their real-life identities, in sharp comparison to behaviors of professionals on social media sites that generally connect to real-life identities such as Facebook or corporate social media accounts (see [21,22]). Second, risks associated with professional disclosure might be much less concerning than types of disclosures that might carry social stigmas. Therefore, professionals may have experienced less mental burden when disclosing about the professional aspects of themselves, even when it dealt with lack of expertise or failure. Third, the creative, volatile, and emerging nature of UX means that UX designers oftentimes rely on their own counterparts for career development and competence maintenance [17,36,37], and social media may have the potential to support them in learning and socializing with each other [53,54]. These opportunities are not yet fully provided by corporate settings where these UX designers work. As a result, the UX occupation embraces professional publicity on social media—UX designers build online websites and portfolios, publish their opinion pieces on sites such as Twitter and medium.com, and promote their work in general.

6.2 Disclosure as Legitimate Peripheral Participation

We suggest that self-disclosure could function as a form of legitimate peripheral participation for two reasons. First, disclosing posts attracted both more comments and more disclosure in comments. This suggests that proper disclosure to obtain better, higher-quality replies was also a competency that newcomers to the community needed to learn and master to participate effectively. Newcomers admitted their inferiority in terms of experience and expertise, in exchange for candid career advice or desired knowledge resources. Newcomers used this means of participation to acquire experience and understanding of the community. Experienced members also used disclosure as a way to both support newcomers and legitimize their own opinions and suggestions.

Second, newcomers and experienced members also differed in their posting and commenting behaviors. The disclosing practices observed in this community contain noticeable differences between disclosure by posters and commenters that were rooted in different conversational contexts. When UX designers created posts and disclosed, we could observe clear goals in their posts, to either share or seek information about a particular topic. But for commenters, disclosure was oftentimes a reactive act, including a response to specific information requests that fulfilled a specific purpose, situated in a case-by-case conversational situation. Therefore, compared to disclosure in posts that newcomers made to seek help, disclosure in comments relied upon commenters' acquisition of community tendencies and predispositions as to the appropriate moment and content to disclose. This observation resonates well with Bogers and Wernersen's study of motivations for using Reddit [14], in which they reported that among posters 73% were casual users and 12% were active users, compared to commenters where 49% were casual users and 37% were active users. Our dataset did not cover the whole lifespan of the subreddit to assess whether a user was casual or active, but their disclosure practices differed between posts and comments. In our dataset, 32% posts disclosed as newcomers, more than 4% of posts disclosing as senior members. 7.8% comments disclosed as newcomers, while less than 16.4% of comments disclosed as senior members. An implication from this percentage discrepancy is that commenters were likely to be more experienced than posters; and that commenters went through an enculturation process in which they gradually acquired an understanding of proper disclosure.

Lave and Wenger discussed career trajectories in CoP, highlighting the importance of developing a professional identity in addition to acquiring necessary skills [57]. Previous work has also explored how professional graphic designers or software developers made decisions regarding the disclosure of their work and expertise in professional communities [65,66]. Our study started to reveal the closely related nature of disclosure and development of professional expertise: disclosure facilitated professional communication through which professional knowledge and information was generated and disseminated.

Interestingly, the pseudonymous subreddit community does not have mechanisms to support the revelation of designers' true identity. Still, self-disclosure of seniority reported in our study became a regular component of daily professional communication. This resonates with Lave and Wenger's conceptualization of CoP as defined by a shared enterprise, rather than a shared location [57].

Previous CSCW literature has explored how employees pay special attention to online disclosure in professional contexts. For example, DiMicco et al.'s interview study with IBM employees reported that more interviewees were willing to share more personal information and were less concerned about negative consequences of disclosure on the enterprise social media system in IBM than sharing on external social media sites such as Facebook, indicating a high level of trust in other employees than in other external sites' users [21]. Also in the context of IBM, Matthews et al. found that employees highlighted the role of professional communities in allowing them to seek and share information [68]. While prior work has shown how employees within one organization use disclosure to aid professional communication, our study depicts another scenario where employees from many different places in the world have formed a professional online community outside of a traditionally-bounded organizational setting. Designers commonly disclosed their personal information such as personal websites, blogs, and portfolios, so as to promote their own creative work and share their opinions. In doing so, these community members were actively constructing their professional identity as a UX designer that

existed beyond the specific subreddit community or their own organization. This observation also echoes Takhteyev's study of Brazilian software developers who considered themselves as part of a "large and somewhat abstract collective people...who write software code" [92]. The creative class of UX designers might be similarly less bounded by their own organizations—perhaps impacted by factors such as internal organizational hostility or isolation—with an aspiration to connect with a disparate and distributed community of like-minded practitioners to build a sense of competency and shared identity.

6.3 The Roles of Online Communication in Supporting Professional Development

Building upon prior research that highlights information seeking in newcomer socialization [10,71], our findings and discussion reveal that professional disclosure facilitated newcomers' information seeking in this UX community. However, this disclosure was not merely for the purpose of seeking or exchanging occupational information. Rather, such online communication engendered rich social opportunities for geographically distributed UX designers to get to know, socialize with, and learn from each other, similar to prior research findings on how online communities facilitated the socialization of crowd workers [45,46,91]. However, newcomer socialization in online communities often faces challenges such as limited guidance from senior members [55], echoed by Hui et al.'s study that reported how novices could gather and analyze instruction from a distributed network of nonexperts [47]. In this paper, we focused on how disclosure as a discursive strategy might productively solicit guidance or opinions from both senior and junior community members.

Previous literature has discussed how crowd workers might be isolated from others and rendered invisible [49,67], but could nevertheless form networks of collaboration and develop a sense of global community [38,83,97]. UX designers appear to face analogous social challenges, and must simultaneously develop professional skills and a sense of personal competency while also claiming legitimacy in their own organizations. This UX online community, likely in conjunction with many other news and social media network sites, connects UX professionals, supporting them in discussing shared issues about their own career and the broader UX occupation. In this scenario, disclosure allows UX designers to better understand each other's specific situation, challenges, and struggles, and collectively envision what UX practices, knowledge, and occupational boundaries should exist.

The CSCW community has long recognized the organizing power of social media platforms that bring a massive amount of people together to collectively identify, discuss, and propose solutions to shared issues [23,89]. In this occupational space of UX, we have begun to see that creative professionals might productively utilize social media sites such as Reddit to cultivate a global community of UX practice and form discourses around prominent issues with UX as an occupation and paths to move forward [54]. We have shown that professional self-disclosure is a useful angle to observe how UX professionals align their personal occupational socialization process with the larger goal of their global professional community.

6.4 Professional Disclosure, Community Engagement, and Practical Implications

The construction and maintenance of professional competence is one of the defining characteristics of professional communities. Much previous research concerns competency

growth [65] and the dichotomy of amateur and professional [75]. As indicated by this prior research, much professional discussion in this community took place around competency development, where amateurs and newcomers aspired to become UX professionals. Particularly, one type of disclosure was used to set positive examples showing how a layperson without professional background or relevant academic degree became a UX professional, representing a sense of egalitarian access to professional status.

Previous online community research has shown how disclosing posts could elicit more responses from the community [16,31,55], and this finding was echoed in this study. Considering previous literature on self-disclosure [20,51,74] and online community design [55], we highlight several social mechanisms that are likely to support this pattern. First, social exchange theory suggests that disclosure could attract more disclosing responses. In our study, UX professionals were more likely to use disclosure to reply to disclosure, thus increasing and amplifying community response. Second, disclosure could specify questions by adding details, which better informs commenters as to what information to provide. Third, disclosure of personal experiences could encourage empathy among community members, who would provide social support in forms such as encouragement and comfort. This is similar to findings from studies of sensitive disclosure on social media [5,41].

Our findings regarding the utility of disclosure have implications for the design of online communities, particularly those that support creative or emergent work practices. Previous literature on professional communities [65,66] has demonstrated the value of platform design in structuring the way designers were able to present themselves. Without such features on Reddit, designers were not able to maintain a fixed form of self-disclosure, such as how skilled or inexperienced they were in UX. It is important to note that other subreddits have used flair² or other quasi-formalized mechanisms to celebrate specific accomplishments, but these mechanisms were not used in the community under study. Given the benefits of professional disclosure, builders of professional online communities could consider introducing more structured means of self-presentation, such as a profile page where professionals could describe their professional expertise and attach portfolios, similar to established sites like Behance. The disclosure of personal competence suggested that gamification features such as badges, ranks, and post or comment scores could be used to mark professionals' competence on a particular topic, thus fostering fast recognition of senior members and connecting opportunities between newcomers and old-timers. Social networking features could also be considered to enhance the sociality of a professional community. Even without these sociotechnical affordances, it does appear that self-disclosure was productively used as a strategy to encourage socialization and the development of a supportive global community; thus, affordances such as those mentioned in this section may impact or support creative communication, but should not necessarily be seen as constitutive of these practices.

7 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This study is focused on disclosure in professional communication that happened *in the wild*, as UX designers in this community took the initiative and drove their conversations, where disclosure might or might not be present. As such, we took an interpretive approach to explain and contextualize professional disclosure as the core contribution of this work. In the dataset we

² flair refers to icon or text next to a username, and is set up by the moderators of a subreddit.

collected, we only observed limited instances where designers commented on others' disclosure, which is substantially different from self-report studies that could solicit people's credibility assessment of the information they receive [43,59].

We also lack sufficient methods to elaborate on how professionals decide what and how much to disclose, whether they might perceive or even encounter harm because of their disclosure, as well as how they perceive the tradeoff between benefits and risks such as a privacy breach. Future work and system design efforts could use interviews and surveys to explore how professionals perceive and evaluate information from their online communication partners, as well as their decision making in using self-disclosure strategies in professional online communication.

Considering our sample size of 200 posts and 1504 comments in comparison to the larger dataset we have collected, as well as the much longer history of the subreddit community, we do not claim that our findings and particularly the distributions of themes and categories represent the overall patterns of the professional online community, or disclosure in other professional communities and settings. Rather, our contributions lie in articulating the nuances and complexities in professional disclosure, and analyzing the functional role of disclosure in professional online communication. Future studies, however, could explore mixed-approaches that utilize both qualitative coding and machine learning techniques in testing disclosure patterns at a much larger scale and across multiple platforms, to build more comprehensive understanding of disclosure's distribution, frequency, and impact in professional online communication. Such an approach may be valuable in building a richer understanding of how the creative class could utilize digital technologies to socialize and learn, even while formal support for education and competence building is likely to continue to lag behind these more dynamic and personally-driven conversations.

8 CONCLUSION

We reported an analysis of self-disclosure in an online professional community. Self-disclosure played an important role in online professional communication. Self-disclosing practices in posts and in comments exhibited vastly different characteristics, where forms of disclosure in posts were relatively uniform, but disclosure in comments served a variety of discursive functions. Most importantly, much of the self-disclosure indicates the community's focus on the development and maintenance of UX competency. More research is needed to more fully explicate the role of self-disclosure in online professional communication, the intertwined nature of design work and discipline, the range and expertise of designers, and the supportive and self-learning aspects of these communities that either welcome or exclude participation by new members.

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