This article is about flash forums. These types of forums have four distinct characteristics, they have a wide and diverse authorship, large in size, focused on a specific topic, and time constrained. They are called flash, because they are formed quickly and end quickly, similar to a “flash mob”. Flash forums are an excellent tool to gain a lot of insight into a topic really quickly - although, it is faced with some difficulty. The navigation of a flash forum is actually quite difficult, since there are no thread structure clues. To combat this problem, a few flash forums have implemented a voting system, whereby users can pick articles they like to move up in the forums. These methods don’t always work though. The article mentions that Slashdot.com – a news portal that provides a place for users to comment – has employed a sophisticated voting system but it is still not able to surface valuable posts in a short time frame.

The article also mentioned that there were fewer repeat posters of Slashdot and Jam. These postings are referred to as “drive by” posting. This is when authors post their thoughts, comments, and concerns without actually responding to a thread, just posting and leaving. When comparing this to Usenet, we see that there is a lot more repeat posters, but not a large quantity of posters. Therefore, a forum may be less rich and diverse in content since there are a lower number of posters. This could cause ideas to stagnate or have people repeating previous arguments. A new technology emerged to deal with the challenges of navigating through a Flash Forum. This technology is called ForumReader. The technology focuses on content rather than people who are posting. It emphasizes finding interesting posts with relevant knowledge that you can comment about, rather than finding interesting people who you may share similar interests with.

IBM implements this Forum Flash technology with ValuesJam (ForumReader) for their company-wide discussion on values. It is a very short event, only 3 days, and brings about 8,000 posts from 5,000 participants. The
company failed at this service, if their intent was to collaborate and discuss ideas for company values. However, the point may simply be to generate as much participation as possible. If this were the case, then IBM is doing a great job. They are getting a maximum amount of users to post, and in the processes generating the maximum amount of ideas without having to deal with people discussing or commenting on each other’s ideas. This probably reduces the amount of quality ideas, but definitely increase the quantity.
CodeSaw: A Social Visualization of Distributed Software Development

This article indicates new methods of analyzing distributed programming projects. A specific social visualization of distributed software development is CodeSaw. CodeSaw bridges the gap between code databases and project communication. It enables programmers to share their code, and then brings this collaboration together with the communication surrounding that code. I found it very interesting that CodeSaw is primarily used for open-source projects. Volunteers, who work for free, have no strict schedule and simply code as a hobby conduct these projects. Although, there are exceptions to this rule where some developers maintain online forums whereby they can exchange ideas and collaborate.

I found it quite interesting that a study showed that 40% of a developers time is spent communicating about the code. It seems quite hard for me to imagine a small group of developers creating, marinating and updating code for a massive scale project like Firefox or Apache. I would expect some collaboration systems set in place to aid the development efforts. This seems to where CodeSaw comes in.

CodeSaw basically allows developers to see how they have contributed in comparison to others. Through this method, developers are able to notice cycles in the development of the project, understand the roles that other people have played, and confirm any support they have received. This method also allows others to analyze the trends for specific developers, such as a developer may code late at night, or only during a major holiday, etc. In this sense, it develops a feeling of community. This solves the problem that developers faced of detachment from their fellow developers, which led to a lack of motivation.

CodeSaw also facilitates the interaction of users and coders. Through CodeSaw someone who is viewing a visualization of particular software can leave comments for the development team. This helps developers feel needed and important – giving them a sense of purpose. The non-coding community also interacts with developers when they submit bug reports.
Bridging the Gap: A Genre Analysis of Weblogs

The article provides a description and result of a content analysis of over 200 randomly selected Weblogs (online blogs). Weblogs are webpages that are modified quite frequently and listed in reverse chronological order. Writing on these Weblogs is seen as a form of expression, journaling, or posting interesting news to the world. It is fairly simple to blog. One simply needs access to a computer with an Internet connection. Blogging allows people to express themselves and perhaps could help provoke thoughts or comments that would normally never be expressed. For example, blogs have become a grassroots form of media and become alternative news sources for large and small news stories worldwide like the US led invasion of Afghanistan or the bombings in Mumbai.

Various industries actually view blogs in different ways. News reporters view blogs as an informal source of news. Academics and Businesses view blogs as a source of information. And, personal bloggers and individuals create blogs as forms of social expression and empowerment. The key to the idea of blogs is that they are updated frequently. According to a prominent blogger who published in print about blogs, Rebecca Blood, “most weblogers make a point of giving their readers something new to read every day.”

The article further reviews different types of weblogs such as: filter blogs, where authors would pre-surf the web and direct readers to specific content; personal journals where an author would express his thoughts and opinions; notebooks where an author writes longer more focused essays. Blood mentions that earlier blogs were filters, and now the journal type is more prominent.

To test this point, researchers randomly selected 203 blogs through an online random blog selector. The criteria for blog selection were English language, low amount of text, not community center announcements and active blogs. The results were then compared for filtered and non-filtered cases.