

Final reflection HW9

a) A social epidemic took place during homework 9 because a large majority of the class ended up with wikipedia as their social network website of choice. The marketing of that particular website was effective enough to create an epidemic.

b) The phases of this particular epidemic are indistinct, because instead of a strict viral marketing campaign, where the epidemic reproduces itself through email or word-of-mouth, there was a broadcasted announcement of a particular website as soon as the assignment was announced, making an almost instantaneous explosive growth phase. The epidemic reached burnout phase quickly also because everyone knew about wikipedia from the start of the epidemic, and either chose it as their website or decided against it quickly.

c) To make an epidemic less likely, the homework could have been redesigned so that each individual could only get a certain number of points for having a website in common with classmates. For example, a group of 10 people sharing a website would get 10 points, but could earn no more for extra people. In this way, there would be no incentive to have a total epidemic in order to earn points.

Another way to redesign the homework would be to prohibit use of the google groups email list. This easy broadcasting of information makes everyone susceptible to infection at the same time and therefore makes a total epidemic more likely. If the assignment depended upon strict word-of-mouth, and no mass information sharing of any kind, then an epidemic would be much less likely.

One last way to lessen the likelihood of an epidemic would be to simulate inherent resistance to infection by prohibiting certain members of the class to share the same website, or to select particular websites, thus

automatically limiting the spread of the social epidemic. In our actual practice of homework 9, a couple of participants displayed this kind of inherent resistance to infection on their own by making the choice to reject the epidemic on their own. This type of resistance is seen in social epidemics when certain people for their own reasons choose not to participate, or in biological epidemics when certain people are biologically resistant to the epidemic.

d) It was already very likely that there would be an epidemic in Homework 9, but to make it virtually certain that everyone would choose the same website, the assignment could have been heavily weighted as a major factor in our final grade, and passing the assignment could depend upon everyone choosing the same website. In that case, there would have been a flurry of marketing activity to make sure that everyone chooses the same thing.