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Untangling the Value of Online Fiber Communities

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UNTANGLING THE VALUE OF ONLINE FIBER COMMUNITIES

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Knitting Disparaged ... Now

- A “hobby now synonymous with mad old aunts” when former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s planned to knit a toy kangaroo for the royal baby (Guardian, 2013).

WSJ: Enhancing Fiber Fans' Ethos?

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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Knitting ... As Perceived Then

□ “From the morning til late
at night
My knitting wires are
seldom still
For all that I make to the
hop I must take
And hand it over to Truck
For calico, sugar, and tea.”

--19th century verse qtd. in
*Knitting: Fashion, Industry, &
Craft*

□ Local/regional practice
likely spread along trade
routes

--*L'art du trichoter*, 1802.

Knitting: The Image Problem

- Marginal
- Mad
- Simple ... and manual
- Local ... and regional
- Old ... and old-fashioned
- Female ... and feminine
- Hobby ... not profession

Knitting is business



**It's not personal
It's just business**

Knitting as a 21st century business

- 2005 *Yarn Harlot* promotion: “Over 50 million people in America knit. The average knitter spends between \$500 and \$1,700 a year on yarn, patterns, needles, and books.”
- In 2009, Ravelry announced the sale of 100,000 patterns at a value of more than \$500,000 (Unraveled, 7.17.2009)
- TNNA’s 2013 market data outlines a \$800 million fiber arts economy, with approximately half of spending by knitters (State of Needlearts, 2013)

Digital Technology & Handcrafts

- Cambridge University's Centre for Material Texts: Text and Textiles conference (2012)
 - ▣ A theme: "text/textile interface"
 - ▣ Tim Ingold: "Telling by Hand: Weaving, Drawing, Writing"
- Matt Kirschenbaum:
 - ▣ Digital materiality
 - ▣ Two-fold meaning of digital (online, hand/fingers)

Create > Knit > Knit

Knit

YARN WEIGHT+



Eleventh Hour Scarf



Monogrammed Hats



Dovetail Scarf



Eleventh Hour



Seamed Socks



Color Dipped Scarves

Digital media: Insights into fibercraft

Commercial/store sites, online only outlets, free-content aggregators

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Search

Up one notch

Posted on November 3, 2015 by Stephanie Pearl-McPhee

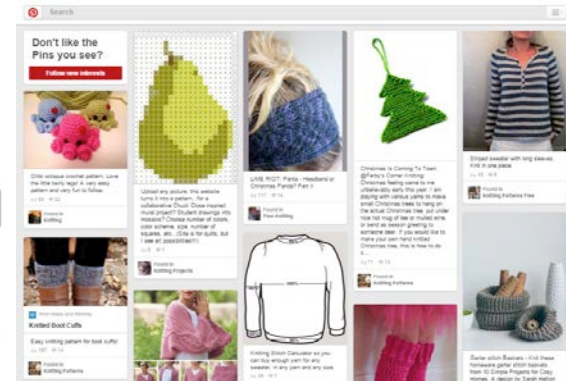
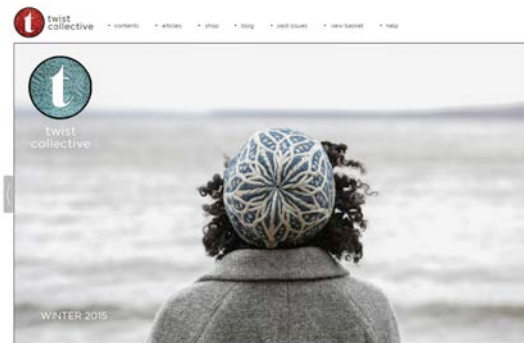
A few months ago... or maybe a little longer than that, I had dinner with my mum, sister, mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. We took a few pictures, and they all looked great, and I looked... less great. I've never been good at that whole scene – outfits, hair, makeup. I do okay in the shoe department, thanks to a tiny little fetish for well made, totally comfortable shoes that look as good as they feel, but when it comes to the rest of it, I tend to be the lady wearing old jeans. a tee-shirt with a hole in it and mismatched (but very well made)

NOVEMBER 2015

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					
« Oct			Dec »			

RECENT POSTS

- After All: 5 things



Blogs, online magazines, and general social media sites with relevant content

search patterns

search by name, designer, book, anything...



Want to browse?

Use the [pattern browser & advanced search](#)

personalize



[knit + crochet](#)



[crochet](#)



[knitting](#)

hot right now

Designs that Ravelers are looking at today

pattern	favorites
 Surf by Kephren Pritchett	1156
 Atalaya by Laura Aylor	891
 Starfish by Lynn Nasal	217
 Mrs. Hughes' Afghan by Downton Abbey Yarn Collection Design Team	410
 Black Hole Sun by Alice Twain	163
browse patterns in this order...	Top 20

featured advertisers




browse categories

A few of the 200+ categories of patterns... [view all categories](#)

[Bag](#)
[Booties](#)
[Cardigan](#)
[Cowl](#)
[Dishcloth](#)
[Dress](#)
[Doily](#)
[Fingerless Hat](#)
[Jewelry](#)
[Mittens](#)
[Pet](#)
[Pullover](#)
[Scarf](#)
[Shawl/Wrap](#)
[Shrug](#)
[Skirt](#)
[Slippers](#)
[Socks](#)
[Softies](#)
[Sweater](#)
[Top](#)
[Vest](#)

designers on ravelry!

 Designers have made **233581** patterns available as Ravelry downloads.

[all patterns](#)
[free patterns](#)
[patterns for sale](#)

your pattern highlights



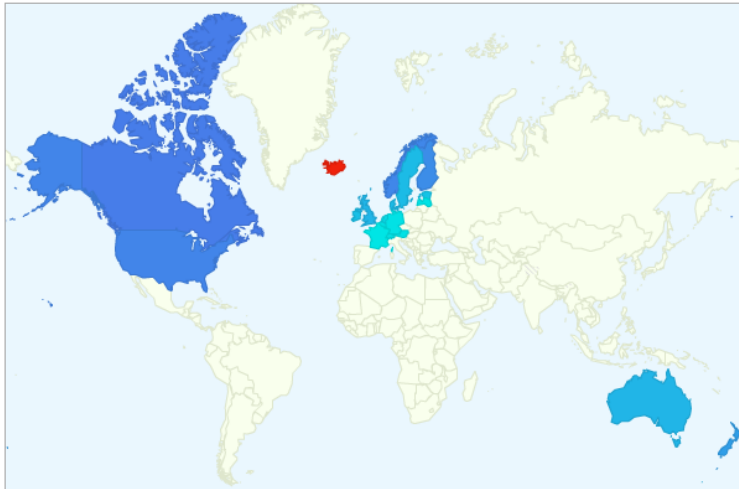
Ravelry

By most anecdotal and metrical indicators, the largest international fiber-craft site

What is Ravelry?

- Per Ravelry creators: “a free site for knitters and crocheters” with +4 million members
- Per Humphreys (2009): “complex blend of users, economies and motivations;” database, marketplace, and more
- Per Slate (2011): “social network for knitters,” a “smaller and bespoke” Facebook
- Per Pearl-McPhee (2014): Wikipedia for knitters
- Per JBP: source for fiber-craft **metrics**

Ravelry information on fibercraft ... as international



Iceland is leading the way with an estimated 346 Ravelers per 10,000 Icelanders! Here are the top countries that members hail from:

1.	 Iceland:	346 Ravelers per 10000
2.	 Canada:	90 per 10000
3.	 United States:	84 per 10000
4.	 Norway:	83 per 10000
5.	 Finland:	78 per 10000
6.	 New Zealand:	66 per 10000
7.	 United Kingdom:	49 per 10000
8.	 Australia:	49 per 10000
9.	 Denmark:	44 per 10000
10.	 Sweden:	44 per 10000
11.	 Ireland:	41 per 10000
12.	 Estonia:	38 per 10000
13.	 Netherlands:	24 per 10000
14.	 Germany:	16 per 10000

groups by country

 Afghanistan	4 groups with 258 members
 Albania	1 group with 19 members
Antarctica	4 groups with 1655 members
 Argentina	6 groups with 891 members
 Armenia	2 groups with 72 members
 Australia	457 groups with 50481 members
 Austria	26 groups with 4308 members
 Azerbaijan	1 group with 21 members
 Bahrain	1 group with 22 members
 Barbados	1 group with 168 members
 Belarus	1 group with 147 members
 Belgium	34 groups with 3060 members
 Bermuda	4 groups with 39 members
 Bolivia	1 group with 4 members
 Bosnia and Herzegovina	3 groups with 98 members
 Botswana	2 groups with 4 members
 Brazil	22 groups with 2395 members
 Bulgaria	1 group with 151 members
Burma	3 groups with 11 members
 Cambodia	1 group with 29 members
 Canada	1106 groups with 116388 members

Ravelry information on fibercraft ... as international

- +200 recent Favorite patterns
 - ▣ available in more than one language
 - ▣ roughly one-third of the patterns with this status
 - ▣ Non-US designers regularly lead lists: Behm, Davies, etc.
- Examples
 - Wurm hat: English, Finnish, Italian, French, and German
 - Stockholm Scarf: English, Swedish, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, Polish, and Danish

Ravelry information on fibercraft ... as contemporary

- Digital media drive Favorites:
 - Yarn Harlot blog and to be “harlotted” (see <http://www.girlfromauntie.com/journal/not-in-harmony/>)
 - Brooklyn Tweed’s digital Look Books using Issuu
 - Podcasts: proliferation and dedicated groups
- Current events factor in Favorites: royals, disaster relief, Downton Abbey, Harry Potter/OWLS, Obama

Snapshot of fiber/knitting culture showing ...

- Novices and experts seek out and provide information online;
- Digital publishing and distribution foster transnational connections;
- Intermediation, intertextuality feature in documentable practice;
- new links between knitting and ICTs are fundamentally altering the history and the practice of knitting.

In the end, digital fiber communities are hybrids



- Business and personal
- Personal and political
- Global and local
- Digital and digital

- Studies of cyberculture selectively attend to corresponding material culture, and there is too little research on the ways that online outlets preserve and disseminate historical practices. Scholarship on digital publishing and distribution of information should include the way fiber crafts are promulgated via online media. Knowledge of either digital culture or hand-crafts is incomplete without accounting for knitters' increasingly intrinsic reliance on information and communication technologies, as well as sticks and string.

