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Structural difference between public and private communication in an online community

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We investigate an online community where there are two modes of communication. Either a user can reply to others in a public forum in such a way that we see who comments on whom; or they can send e-mail-like direct messages. In this data we investigate network structures (such as degree-distributions and assortativity), temporal structures such as response-, interevent times and activity levels. Furthermore, we measure combined structures from the different communication channels relating to structural-balance theory. Among other things, we find that in private communication, people keep feeling obliged to reply longer than in public discussions. We also observe a weak anti-correlation between activity levels in public and private communication respectively, suggesting that different personality types drive the large-scale structural evolution. We relate our findings to theories of social organization and human dynamics.

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