

BUILDING A PLATFORM FOR JAPANESE EVENTS IN MASSACHUSETTS



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Building a Platform for Japanese Events in Massachusetts

An Interactive Qualifying Project
submitted to the Faculty of
WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Bachelor of Science

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Date:
11 December 2020

Report Submitted to:

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ABSTRACT

Prior to this project, there was no platform displaying Japanese cultural events on and off campus for the Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) community. In this project, we developed a web platform for WPI students to easily access the event information for Japanese cultural events. With the help from WPI's Japanese Culture Club (JCC) and the maintenance manual we created, the platform will be kept up to date in order to provide thorough and accurate information about Japanese events around WPI. During the project, we conducted data collection, semi-structured interviews, surveys, and pilot studies to collect the information and feedback on *Japan @ WPI*, the website we built. *Japan @ WPI* is a viable solution to make searching for Japanese events convenient for the WPI community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Introduction

There are many Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) students interested in Japanese events and opportunities. WPI's Japan Project Center attracts a lot of undergraduate students as it offers projects for the Humanities and Arts (HUA) requirement, Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP), and Major Qualifying Project (MQP). The WPI Japanese Culture Club (JCC) connects students over their love of Japanese culture. Although there is a significant amount of Japanese cultural opportunities on campus and in the Greater Boston area, there initially was no comprehensive central repository for them. Therefore, our goal was to develop an effective platform to increase the exposure of Japanese cultural events and opportunities in Massachusetts for the WPI community.

Attending and participating in events, especially cultural events, expands networking opportunities and brings educational benefits. This is especially important for college students who can gain professional experience and improve their personal development before entering the workplace. Meeting with a variety of people that have diverse backgrounds allows college students to expand their thinking and open their minds to new possibilities and beliefs.

The abundance of online social media and social networking platforms that are available provide the opportunity to exchange announcements, post events, and share their personal brands that best suit their organization or community. Websites and applications like Facebook and Instagram serve as both social media and social networking platforms where users can connect with each other.

Methodology

In order to solve the problem at hand, we set project objectives, including identifying Japanese cultural opportunities, finding out how to categorize the opportunities, determining the best platform, and establishing a maintenance plan for the website. With the objectives in mind, we planned research methods including data collection, semi-structured interviews, surveys, and pilot study to build an effective platform that displays events.

To provide a comprehensive list of events covering all the interests from the WPI community, we conducted a data collection of cultural events and opportunities near WPI. During the data collection process, we visited a large number of event platforms to find their Japanese events and opportunities.

We organized the events on a spreadsheet by sorting them based on the type of event, for example, cuisine, arts, and language. We further sorted the events based on subgroups like restaurants and cooking classes under cuisine and grouped opportunities based on their cost, location and date. The categorization of different events gave us insight on how we should organize the events on the website.

With the spreadsheet compiled and categorized, we interviewed the Japanese Culture Club (JCC) executive team to collect feedback on any missing events and

categories. In addition to the interview, we also surveyed the students who participated in or applied for projects from the Japan Project Center for the same purpose. For both the interview and survey, we asked for their experience with the event searching process to help us assess any difficulties in searching for Japanese events or a lack thereof.

To determine the features to include on the website, we interviewed the executive teams from cultural clubs in WPI to ask for their experience with promoting events. In addition to the interview, we surveyed Japan Project Center applicants to collect their preferences on event displaying platforms and the features they find useful. The information we collected significantly helped us while building the event website, which we titled *Japan @ WPI*. After the completion of the website, we conducted a pilot study with participants from the interviews and surveys. This pilot study was designed to collect overall feedback on the website's layout, navigation, design, and content so that we could improve the website accordingly.

For a long-lasting solution, we developed a maintenance plan to keep all the information accurate and up to date. We reached out to the JCC and our project sponsor to discuss the website's maintenance plan. During the discussion, we provided a set of recommendations on improving and updating the website.

Findings and Results

Our project resulted in *Japan @ WPI*, a website where over 100 Japanese events and opportunities are displayed. We decided to use WordPress to develop the website because it is the most widely used platform for WPI projects. WordPress and its available plug-ins enabled us to organize and style the website. Our findings from interviews, a survey, and pilot studies helped us learn about students' engagement in Japanese events, influenced the design of *Japan @ WPI*, and allowed us to improve and maintain the website.

Student Engagement in Japanese Events

We found that most students had little to no research or attendance experience with Japanese events in and around WPI. Among 90 survey participants, 84% of them stated that they "have never tried to find Japanese opportunities or events within or around WPI." In the survey, 14 responses stated that events and opportunities were "hard to find" and that there were generally "few opportunities." We learned that students prefer being notified about events and finding events on social media platforms. A sizable number of students in our interviews and survey preferred Facebook and Outlook event features because they show attendees on posted events and allow people to save events and receive notifications. In the survey, Outlook was mentioned to be a necessary platform, in coordinating events and encouraging both members and non-members to RSVP for events. Students preferred to be notified by clubs and organizations instead of finding events by themselves. We found from multiple interviewees that student engagement also relies on incentives like free food or networking opportunities. Benefits including any potential growth in profession paths also increased students' motivation in attending events.

Influences on Website Design

We found examples for how we could organize and display the opportunities we found on other websites including the Japan Society of Boston website and EventBrite.com. Elements including detailed descriptions of events, calendars, search filters, and event attendee reviews were valuable components because they are useful web page elements which require little to no maintenance. University websites also influenced the content of *Japan @ WPI* such as the University of Michigan's website which featured archives of past events. We incorporated features from social media networks onto the *Japan @ WPI* website. Each club we interviewed broadcasts events through their own social media accounts. Six out of the seven club member respondents indicated that they use Instagram frequently and also highlighted Instagram's features which are particularly useful. Consequently, our team adopted features from Instagram, such as commenting, and learned that our website's content would not be effective without marketing on social media. After we created our website, pilot studies helped us to improve the website visually according to users' preferences about the website.

Maintenance Plan

We designed our platform to have a concise layout and wrote a supplementary manual for easier maintenance. In our meeting with the current JCC president, Mariko Endo, and our sponsor Prof. deWinter, we came up with a long-term maintenance plan. Prof. deWinter offered a paid secretary position for maintaining and updating the platform about 2 to 3 hours a month, while Mariko will take the position until the next election of JCC.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Due to the limitations of CampusPress, the WordPress version we used, we recommended either transferring the content on *Japan @ WPI* to a different website-building platform or upgrading to WordPress Pro for better visual display and more plugins. In that case, the website will be more user-friendly with advanced functions and visual designs. If this option is not feasible, we would recommend improving the website visually by using CSS to achieve the desired features. We recommended to the future maintenance team to post updates of events on both social media platforms and the website, which would improve the exposure of both Japanese cultural events and *Japan @ WPI*.

We believe that our deliverables of the *Japan @ WPI* website, a maintenance manual and plan on website upkeep, and our recommendations for promoting the website will help connect more students to Japanese events and opportunities near the Worcester area. Our team hopes that *Japan @ WPI* and our research on its importance encourages other cultural clubs to display events and opportunities off campus in a similar fashion on websites of their own. We look forward to seeing how the website progresses and believe that the JCC will fulfil the role of maintaining the website with creativity and passion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the members of the WPI community who contributed to the success of this project. Thank you to all the participants of our interviews, surveys, and pilot studies for helping our team develop *Japan @ WPI*. Special thank you to Professors Melissa Belz and Stephan Sturm for providing valuable feedback throughout the project. We would like to acknowledge the Japan Program Development IQP Team, Giahuy Lenguyen, Mingsi Hu, Jackson Su, and Yifan Gu, for your collaboration and valuable information on Japanese-related courses available to WPI students. We would also like to thank the Japanese Culture Club and its executive members, President Mariko Endo, Vice-President Sarah Hoac, and Secretary Kathleen Duffy for participating in our interviews and maintenance plan for *Japan @ WPI*. Finally, we would like to express our sincere thanks for our project sponsor, Professor Jennifer deWinter for creating our project which communicates the need for a platform for WPI students to get connected with Japanese culture. Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, we are extremely grateful for the opportunity to create such a platform that can encourage students to safely engage in Japanese events and opportunities.

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

Introduction

Cultural events are great ways to both gather those already part of a community and intrigue others outside of that community. The Japanese community of Massachusetts is one group that holds many cultural events, including but not limited to, the Japanese Festival in Boston, tea ceremonies, taiko (traditional style of Japanese drumming (Rooney, 2020), and kyudo (Japanese art of archery (Keown, 2004). Promoting these Japanese events properly is especially important to attract new community members and keep current members engaged. There is an ongoing demand from the Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) community for a catalogue of Japanese events in Massachusetts, with little to no current efforts to collect and display this information. The lack of a network or hub is an obstacle for forming a connected community within WPI. Also, Massachusetts residents who are interested in attending Japanese cultural events would benefit from a common platform, which would encourage students and residents to connect with each other through shared interests in Japanese traditional and pop culture events.

A greater emphasis on sharing events and creating linked communities will provide people the opportunity to connect over common interests. Despite the popularity of the Japan Project Center and the interest in the Japanese Culture Club (JCC), information about off-campus Japanese cultural opportunities is not easily accessible for the WPI community. Therefore, our goal is to develop an effective platform to increase the exposure of Japanese events in Massachusetts for the WPI community. In this chapter, we discuss the benefits of university-community partnership and what entices people to attend events. We also analyze social media and social networking platforms, outline their benefits and drawbacks in displaying information, and define event marketing and how it can be used to attract individuals to events. Lastly, we discuss the popularity of Japanese culture in Massachusetts, how the lack of information displayed to the WPI community and the difficulty for the community to access information leads to our goal of increasing exposure of Japanese opportunities through an online platform.

Establishment of a University-Community Partnership

In universities, students are usually limiting the events they participate in to on-campus without reaching out to the surrounding community. While there are a variety of events that are available off-campus, it would be a great waste of resources if members of the WPI community cannot access those opportunities. In order to achieve our goal of making more information easily accessible to the WPI community, we would like to establish a university-community partnership. A university-community partnership is the collaboration of a higher education institution with agencies, businesses, governments, and residents in its community. Such a partnership utilizes the resources from both the universities and their surrounding communities forming a mutual relationship. This relationship helps more

effectively solve problems faced by the communities and builds social capital for the local societies much more efficiently (Hastad & Tymeson, 1997).

The process of building a university-community partnership comes in various forms. Some examples include students actively participating in community events, universities providing advice to the community about specific issues, and universities and communities collaborating to organize events (Buys & Bursnall, 2007). This process of building a partnership is a necessary step for universities, as it increases engagement towards strenuous, thoughtful, and critical interaction with the non-university world (Bjarnason & Coldstream, 2003). Engagement with the surrounding community benefits universities because it encourages research goals and impacts the university's outside community (Steve et al., 2016).

University-community partnership is one of the most effective methods to unite people with diverse backgrounds and interests for solving issues in a shared community (Steve et al., 2016). According to a study on The University of Nebraska-Lincoln football program, "Even if many of the community members are unaffiliated academically with the institution, they obtain a connection to the university via the football program" (Satterfield, 2011). This is a fitting example of the social engagement and immersion that a university can gain from collaboration with the surrounding community, which is the same as what we want to achieve during this project. We would like to set this project as the starting point of increasing engagement of cultural clubs on campus, to better connect the WPI community to the surrounding society.

Reasons for Having and Participating in Events

Taking part in events expands networking opportunities and brings educational benefits at the same time. By interacting with others, people can expand opportunities of finding others that share their interests. According to a study about social and personal relationships, when people meet others who share similarities, they are more likely to experience increased confidence (Seidman, 2018) and a strengthened sense of self (Hampton, 2018). Therefore, having conversations with people who share the same interests inspires new or deeper understandings of one's existing knowledge. As event attendees learn from event sponsors and other participants, they expand their knowledge base.

College students especially have a lot to gain by joining groups and meeting new people through events. When college students join specific clubs that satisfy their interests, such as learning more about a field of study and recreational related activities, they can gain professional experience and improve their personal development (George Washington Heath Resource Center at the National Youth Transitions Center, n.d.). Students can access information about internships and job opportunities by being active in student-led professional organizations (Penn State, 2001). On the other hand, meeting with a variety of people that have diverse backgrounds allows college students to expand their thinking and interests, hence encouraging the exploration of different interests (Penn State Smeal College of Business, 2001). People from notably distinct backgrounds, for instance: a group of people with different nationalities, are less likely to share cultural commonalities.

Hence, people have higher possibilities of acquiring new knowledge and interests from those who are from unfamiliar cultures, which open their minds to new possibilities and beliefs (Mind and Means, 2018).

Today's Connective Media Platforms: Social Media and Social Networking

Over the past few decades, the media landscape has rapidly changed as social media outlets have developed. Although traditional forms of media (newspapers, magazines, and television and radio broadcasts) are still used as an effective means of distributing information, it has been proven that social media platforms have been more pivotal in persuading the general public to purchase products, participate in events, and interact with others. (Stephen, 2010). According to a study conducted on the complementary roles of traditional and social media in marketing, forum activity in an online community had the greatest impact on sales compared to traditional media, blogs, and discussion forums (Stephen, 2010). This finding emphasizes the “importance of consumer-to-consumer social interactions” in driving the actions of consumers. The abundance of online social media and social networking platforms that are available give people the opportunity to exchange announcements, post events, and share their personal brands that best suit their organization or community.

While social media and social networks seem to be interchangeable terms, they are different in that a social network is a collection of social media. Anyone can publish on social media, as it is defined as “an internet-based way to publish or broadcast digital content that readers can fully interact with” (Froehlich, 2020). Social networking gives people the opportunity to connect to others with shared interests (Pierre, 2018). Social media is unique because it allows people to become a part of a larger community through “following” and “friending” others, and “liking” pages (Shawky et al., 2019). “Following” and “friending” on social media are terms to describe the user’s choice of who they want to connect with (Ouwerkerk & Johnson, 2016). “Liking” content on social media is a feature to express to others that you enjoy or agree with the content (Dedic & Stanier, 2017). Through “following” and “friending” and “liking”, users can show interest in certain content and create two-way communication with others. Social media is different from traditional media, such as print advertisements, billboards, radio, or television (Shah, 2017), because of its potential to create bilateral, or “two-way”, communication and interaction between organizers and the audience (Shawky et al., 2019). These two-way interactions could not be possible without social media platforms, the online communication channels where connections take place (Pierre, 2018). The interactions are what classify social media platforms as social networking sites (Froehlich, 2020).

Websites and applications like Facebook and Instagram serve as both social media and social networking platforms because they provide the channel through which there are posts to showcase events, opportunities, feedback as well as the option to network with others. Connections average at over 634 “friends” for the average American (Figure 1). According to the results from a study conducted on a sample of 2,237 people, there is a notable 1,271-person gap between internet users

and people who are not internet users (Figure 1). Out of the 1,754 people who reported on using the internet, 877 people use Facebook, a social networking platform for connecting with others (Figure 1). These data indicate that a significant number of people use the internet and many also use social media. Considering this data is from a decade ago, these numbers have increased.

Total Network Size	Sample	Internet User	Not an Internet User	Cell Phone User	SNS User	Mobile Internet User
Mean	634	669	506	664	636	717
SD	697	733	527	738	625	764
N (weighted)	2237	1754	483	1700	1037	684

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Social Network Site survey conducted on landline and cell phone between October 20-November 28, 2010. N for full sample 2,255 and margin of error is +/- 2.3 percentage points. N for Facebook users=877 and margin of error is +/- 3.6 percentage points.

Figure 1 Average Size of People’s Overall Social Networks by Use of Different Technologies (Hampton, 2018)

Websites as Structured Platforms for Social Media

Websites are among the most customizable communication mediums, giving the creator as much control as they need over their platforms in terms of adjusting the content and user experience of their website. When it comes to creating a website for providing information on community resources and events, websites that are socially adaptive allow for personalized experiences for event seekers. According to a study on iCITY DSA, which is a website for cultural resources and events, a socially adaptive website is a “social web system that provides adaptive recommendations to users” (Gena, et. al., p. 90). This type of website has the capability for users to post and search for their own content, while encouraging two-way communication through social networking. In this way, communities can post their own events, while allowing for a mingling of networks resulting from shared interests.

With a socially adaptive structure, websites can allow users to provide data about their interests based on their searches or web posts, and, as a result, the web platform responds with feedback that allows users to stay updated on events that appeal to their own interests (Gena, et. al., 2012). Machine learning, which learns user preferences on social activities to best match the user with events that could be of potential interest, determines this feedback (Gena, et. al., 2012). Without social adaptability, it was found that iCITY DSA would not be as effective for its users since there would not be website-generated recommendations based on user interests (Gena, et. al., 2012). Tags, or filters to denote the topic of a user’s post, are purposeful tools for social media websites, because they are used to model user interest and preferences as well as recommendations for users based on explicitly linked mentions on user profiles (Gena, et. al., 2012). This functionality further structures websites as accessible, customizable, and user-friendly media for providing user-specific services. The channel of information that websites provide creates a

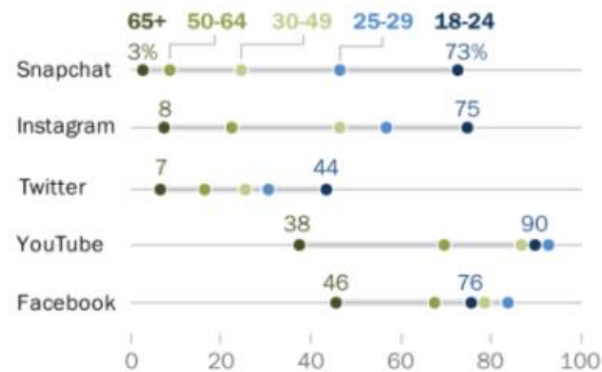
seamless way for social networking to enhance the services of websites and create lasting communities.

Social Networking Within Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms that also classify as social networking sites can unite a community no matter a physical distance (Browne, 2012). Users must spend the necessary time on learning to use a platform and then building an account in order to effectively communicate and interact with others (Shawky et al., 2019; Browne, 2012). There are many platforms under the category of social media, but the most commonly used are Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (Shawky et al., 2019). Facebook is especially unique due to a feature called Facebook Events. When a community or person wants to organize an event, they can publish the information on this platform and invite people to the event. It organizes the event information and keeps track of people interested in the event (Facebook, n.d.). Depending on the events' settings it can be considered a public event, where anyone with or without a Facebook account can see the event, or a private event, which is only visible to those invited (Facebook, n.d.). Event organizers find it beneficial to use Facebook Event pages to increase the number of potential attendees and create more relationships (Phuong & Vinh, 2017).

Snapchat and Instagram are especially popular among 18- to 24-year-olds

% of U.S. adults in each age group who say they ever use ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 8-Feb. 7, 2019.

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Figure 2 Popularity of Social Media Based on Age Group (Perrin & Anderson, 2019).

to students and acknowledging the use of particular social media platforms is important when identifying how to market events to students (McGough & Salomon, 2014).

Social media is also unique because it is more popular among some audiences than traditional media (Shawky et al., 2019). It increased in popularity in the 21st century as an online social engagement tool and initially targeted adolescents and young adults (Woods et. al, 2019). Facebook remains the primary platform for most Americans however, younger Americans (especially 18-to 24-year olds) stand out for embracing a variety of platforms and using them frequently (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Figure 2 shows this by displaying the percentage of U.S. adults in each age group who use Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook.

Use of social media is second nature

Marketing Events

Making efficient use of the features of a platform such as social media and/or social networking is important for showcasing events and opportunities and making them accessible to the public eye. Event marketing is known as the strategic promotion of events in which there is real-time engagement among hosts, participants, and outside sponsors of a community (“What is Event Marketing?”, 2019). Customizing a platform and tailoring what it has to offer to an audience is a form of event marketing. Effective event marketing can leave a lasting impression of what a community’s personal brand is on event viewers and attendees (“What is Event Marketing?”, 2019). According to Preston & Hoyle (2012, p. 1), “the application of strategic marketing concepts...will help you to design the event that is most likely to meet its objectives, and to manage the communication of the event to its best advantage.” Event marketing is a necessary strategy for planning events, which should precede events themselves. Marketing strategies for any event, whether cultural or business related, is essential to the survival of an organization and the communities it supports (Preston & Hoyle, 2012).

Events should be transformative experiences that the attendee fully enjoys and environments for learning (Preston & Hoyle, 2012). People spend time and money on experiences that will improve their knowledge and quality of life. When events are marketed thoughtfully with the audience and purpose in mind, communities grow and flourish as specific consumer needs and interests are being met (Preston & Hoyle, 2012).

Marketing strategies frequently change as marketers receive attendee feedback regarding their platform and/or events. In a study that evaluates social media such as microblogging for event marketing, it has been found that using social media for event marketing to target attendees and entice them to participate in events creates a positive feedback loop between event organizers and the public (Li & Duan, 2018). This positive feedback loop is what keeps community members going to community events and allows for a greater acceptance, reputation, and trust that is put into hosting organizations with consistent satisfactory feedback from their event attendees (Li & Duan, 2018). The study suggests that the key to use social media for event marketing is to “create meaningful two-way interaction and dialogue with audiences, rather than simply making announcements (Li & Duan, p. 77). It was also found that applying a diverse range of messaging styles and mixing announcements with discussion topics and educational materials allows for events on social media to be publicized more naturally to social media users (Li & Duan, p. 77).

Japanese Culture at Worcester Polytechnic Institute

The existing group of people identifying as ethnically Japanese in the U.S. is made up of more than one million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The spread of Japanese popular culture in the U.S, such as anime and video games, has increased the number of Americans who enjoy Japanese anime, movies, and games (Seaton & Yamamura, 2014). Historians have stated that Americans are fascinated by traditional Japanese art such as Ikebana and Bonsai and incorporate it into their lives (Mettler,

2018). Considering the impact of Japanese culture in the United States and the increasing number of people who are interested in the culture, there was a desire to access Japanese cultural events and opportunities in Massachusetts in order to foster social bonding and communication by increasing awareness and introducing the culture to the WPI community. To address this desire, the team determined a strategy to display Japanese events and opportunities to undergraduate, graduate, and prospective students alike.

In Massachusetts, there are multiple online platforms, including Japan Society, Japan Society Boston, Japan Festival Boston, etc. that display Japanese cultural events to the public and meet their needs for social bonding with people of the same interests. However, these platforms are not sufficient for meeting the needs of WPI students because they are not organized into one comprehensive platform that suits the needs and interests of the WPI community. WPI is known for its accelerated curriculum, so students do not have ample time to search through the platforms which might have events they are interested in. It would be more convenient to navigate one online platform which focuses mainly on Japanese cultural events near WPI.

Our sponsor, Professor Jennifer deWinter, is the head of the Japan Project Center and has defined a clear interest and need for a Japanese event platform at WPI. Prof. deWinter notified our team that there were students who have reported difficulty in finding local Japanese cultural events. Our goal was to develop a web platform, which focuses solely on Japanese culture, to increase the exposure of Japanese events and communities to different audiences in WPI. The project first identified Japanese cultural opportunities on and near WPI campus, categorized them, and then determined the most effective platforms based on the information displayed to the WPI community. Finally, we determined a set of feasible and long-lasting options for updating the platform with Japanese cultural events on and off campus. The stakeholders' needs and concerns have been considered when we decided the proper manager of the platform and found ways to make the web platform easy to find and use.

METHODOLOGY

The goal of our project was to develop an effective platform to increase the exposure of Japanese cultural opportunities to the Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) community. We achieved this goal by:

1. Identify Japanese cultural opportunities on and near the WPI campus.
2. Determine categories for Japanese cultural opportunities according to each of their details.
3. Determine the most effective platform to present event information.
4. Determine a set of feasible and long-lasting options for maintaining and leveraging the platform.

Objective 1: Identify Japanese cultural opportunities on and near the WPI campus.

It was important for us to find as many Japanese cultural events and opportunities in and around Massachusetts as possible because we wanted to provide a cohesive and all-inclusive event platform for the WPI community. We searched for events of different types to be displayed on the platform to provide a range of opportunities and to cover all interests of the WPI community based on survey and interview results. In addition to events that have a specific date and time, we looked for opportunities such as clubs, Japanese courses, and museum exhibits that happen regularly or are available for a longer period of time. We collected data on all these events and opportunities to display them on our website. We conducted an interview with Japan Culture Center (JCC) members and a survey with non-club members who attended or applied for the Japan Project Center to add the events and event categories that had not yet been in the collection before in order to have a more comprehensive list of events and opportunities.

Visit platforms to collect event opportunities on and around the WPI campus.

Starting the process of finding Japanese events that were available for the WPI community, we created a data collection of cultural events on the websites and social media platforms of Japanese organizations within reach of the WPI community. We checked for cultural groups in Massachusetts, including the Japan Society of Boston, the Ikebana International Boston chapter, the Japan Festival Boston, and the New England Anime Society to see what they have to offer to the WPI community. We used these groups' calendars and featured events to assort Japanese cultural events. We organized the events and opportunities we found into a spreadsheet. We separated the columns of the spreadsheet by categories, title, website link, hosting organization, location, date and time, and a description. The category column was further decided through the second objective.

Interview Japanese Culture Club (JCC) members.

After we generated an initial list of Japanese cultural events through the previous methods, we ensured that we were including all of the Japanese cultural events that are available to the WPI community. We did this by interviewing three of the executive members from the JCC. We asked them to go through our list of event categories and we collected feedback on any categories and events that we missed. We asked the interviewees whether they encounter obstacles when searching for Japanese specific events. This interview was conducted jointly with the interview about event platforms, from Objective 3, Method 1, since these two interviews depended on each other and shared the same groups of interviewees. The interview questions are found in Appendix A.

Survey students who attended or applied for projects at the Japan Project Center

In addition to the interview with JCC members, we also wanted input from students who attended or applied for projects in the Japan Project Center. We asked the participants to select Japanese cultural event categories based on their interest and for their recommendations on events we did not include. The survey also asked them about any difficulties that they have encountered during searching for Japanese cultural events. The survey questions are found in Appendix B.

Objective 2: Determine categories for Japanese cultural opportunities according to their details.

From the list of events that we compiled through Objective 1, we were able to group events by category. We sorted the events based on the type of event, for example, cuisine, martial arts, language, etc. We sorted all the opportunities even further based on subgroups within those categories. Another way we grouped opportunities was based on the information about the events like cost, location, or date. We needed to organize the events based on these subgroups to simplify making our decision regarding how we will display the events on the new Japanese events platform. We identified the categories on the spreadsheet and used filters within columns to better organize our data. An example of how the spreadsheet is organized is in Appendix G.

Objective 3: Determine the most effective platform(s) based on how and what information will be displayed to the WPI community.

To make the decision of which platform to use to display events to the WPI community, we looked at the WPI platforms that are currently being used. We interviewed WPI clubs and organizations and surveyed students who attended or applied to projects in the Japan Project Center to see what platforms and features these groups use already. We also conducted a pilot study to see what users liked and disliked about the website we designed and how easily they navigated it. When

describing the term platform, we define it as any digital site to display information such as a website or social media platform.

Interview WPI cultural clubs on the effectiveness of platforms they currently use.

In order to determine the most effective platforms and features, we conducted semi-structured interviews with club members on campus. Our team asked the members of cultural clubs, including the president, vice president and secretary of the JCC, the president and secretary of the Hispanic Caribbean Student Association (HCSA), the vice president of the Korean Student Association (KSA), the vice president of the Muslim Students Association (MSA) about the current platforms they use for displaying events and which platforms are more favorable based on accessibility and ease of use. These questions are shown in Appendix C. The interviews helped us to obtain information from students' perspectives (Survey Method, n.d.). Our team collected our interviewees' perspectives on whether the current platforms need improvement and which features are more favorable. This data helped us determine what the best platforms and features are for listing cultural events for the WPI community.

Survey WPI community members who attended or applied to projects from the Japan Project Center

In addition to the interviews with club members, we also conducted a survey with students who attended or applied for either IQP or MQP at the Japan Project Center. These students have experience with studying and living in Japan or have interest in Japanese Culture. The survey questions are shown in Appendix D. The survey asked for students' opinions on different event displaying platforms and which features they like from those platforms. From the responses collected, we were able to incorporate the favorable aspects onto our own website.

Conduct a pilot study to collect feedback on platforms.

Pilot studies are particularly useful in evaluating the effectiveness of a platform or product. More specifically, these small-scale studies help determine whether crucial aspects of the main study will be feasible (What is a pilot study?, 2018). Our team conducted a pilot study in which students would look for an event on our team's chosen web platform. Then, we monitored their feedback with a think-out-loud approach to better analyze the performance and effectiveness of our platform. A think-out-loud approach is a usability engineering method that asks test participants in a study to verbalize their thoughts when interacting with a user interface (World Leaders in Research-Based User Experience., n.d.).

We selected the participants in the pilot study from our previous interview, based on the response to this question: "We are building a platform to display Japanese cultural events for WPI students... Are you willing to attend this pilot study?" (Question 6, Appendix C, and Question 2, Appendix D). In the pilot study, these club members interacted with the platform that we built so that our team could find out what their perspectives are and suggestions on what could be improved and

what features are preferred. Students individually walked themselves through finding and registering for an event. The team collected data from the pilot study by using analytical questions for feedback on website designs and providing clear instructions on how we are expecting the user to make effective use of our website. Based on the information from the preceding interview, our team assessed participating students on their general familiarity and opinions about current event platforms used by WPI. To view our pilot study questions, see Appendix E.

Objective 4: Determine a set of feasible and long-lasting options for maintaining and leveraging the platform.

After we developed the platform, we recognized that the JCC would be needed to ensure the platform was kept up to date. As long as events continue to happen, the platform would need to be updated with current events. Maintenance included making sure that the platform features live events with correct and up-to-date details, adding new events to the platform, and removing past events. To ensure that the web platform is kept up to date with new events and archived information, our team collaborated with JCC, providing valuable information for how to navigate and use our platform.

Interview clubs and organizations on organizing and maintaining the platform.

We conducted a semi-structured interview with the WPI JCC to see if they would be interested in and able to update and promote the platform. The WPI JCC is the most significant club currently at WPI which shares Japanese culture, language, and activities. Therefore, it was the most efficient and effective for us to collaborate with their executive members and advisor, Prof. deWinter, on updating the platform. During the interview, we provided a maintenance manual (see attachment) for how the club should maintain and update the platform. For example, we gave instructions on how to update the information on the platform such as adding any new Japanese cultural events. Our suggestions to the JCC were based on our continued research. We also determined the appropriate time needed, about two to three hours per month, for the maintenance position to revisit and update the platform. Our specific interview procedures are in Appendix F.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Our project resulted in an organized website, titled *Japan @ WPI*, where Japanese events and opportunities are displayed. With guidance from our sponsor (Prof. deWinter), we decided to use WordPress to develop the website because it simplifies the process of building a website. The templates within WordPress helped us organize the content the way we wanted and only required minor coding in CSS to fix some style elements. In this chapter we will discuss the findings from the interviews, surveys, and pilot studies which helped influence our decisions for the website and its maintenance.

Students Engagement in Japanese Events

We found that most students had little to no research or attendance experience on Japanese events outside WPI from both the interviews with Japan Culture Club (JCC) members and the survey we sent out. Among the 90 responses we obtained from the survey, 84% of participants stated that they “have never tried to find Japanese opportunities or events within or around WPI.” A survey question asking for students’ experience with searching for Japanese cultural events received 14 written responses with 4 students stating that the events and opportunities were “hard to find” and there were only a limited number of events. About one third of students answered that their difficulty in searching for events was that they were “not able to find events with Google,” and another one third of students stated that they simply “couldn’t find any specific event of interest.” These responses showed that students had little experience on event searching because either they thought it would be very difficult to find and had not tried, or they tried but could not find the ones with interest.

Also, students felt motivated to attend events when there were incentives or benefits, for example, the opportunity to connect with others in attendance. We found that multiple interviewees from cultural clubs stated that they would consider the cost of the opportunities and prioritize the “free or networking opportunities.” From the interviews we conducted about event displaying platforms like Facebook, we found that students preferred a feature called Facebook Events because they can see people who are attending a posted event. Considering students’ interest in the event cost, we decided to include the cost information in our event page for as many events as possible. Benefits that include any potential growth in profession paths also increased students’ motivation in attending an event. We received some attendance data and responses from the Hispanic Caribbean Student Association (HCSA) that indicate that students’ attendance levels were influenced by a point system in which members who attend earn points for going to events held on campus and those club members with the most points are invited to attend a national conference with internship opportunities. The conference also hosts companies who sponsor visas, which is a valuable opportunity for international students. These members have a high incentive to be involved in events because it leads to internship opportunities. These findings have given our team a different perspective on student preferences when it comes to attending events, which told us that students want to grow personally, academically,

and professionally in the events that they attend to make connections with people of different backgrounds and put themselves in positions to gain knowledge and/or experience in areas of interest.

Influences on Website Design

When we were researching Japanese cultural events to include on our website, we also found examples for how we could organize and display the information we found. One of the first websites we found when looking for Japanese events was the Japan Society of Boston website. It includes a section with a calendar and lists a range of events under a multitude of categories. Each event listing is clearly outlined with a detailed description, date, and cost for the event; this layout inspired our organization of the *Japan @ WPI* website. Another aspect of The Japan Society of Boston website which influenced the design of the *Japan @ WPI* website was its extensive list of reviews on ramen restaurants in Boston. These reviews and descriptions of permanent opportunities were a valuable finding because they are one-time posts on the website. These posts would require little maintenance regarding the content, which is desirable for future caretakers of *Japan @ WPI*.

We came across other event displaying platforms that not only provided us with Japanese events, but also gave us some ideas on how to display information on *Japan @ WPI*. Eventbrite.com is an event displaying website that we discovered while researching. We found that unique events displayed on Eventbrite.com, such as “Tall Oaks: A Nature Walk and Haiku Workshop,” “Beginner's Kumihimo Class (Japanese Braiding),” and “The Prehistoric Jomon Pottery of Japan: Ancient Art through Archaeology”, were easily accessible with Eventbrite.com’s event categorization and descriptive information. When you find a search result on the website, you also have the option to filter your results by date, category, price, currency and more. We thought this organization of information could be useful on the *Japan @ WPI* website. This prompted us to search for other websites that could suggest how to organize our own website. Another website that displayed Japanese events in a unique way was University of Michigan’s Center of Japanese Studies website. This website included a link for each event so you could add the event to your Google calendar which we realized could be useful on the WPI platform. University of Michigan’s website also displayed a whole section of videos from past events. This section listed the videos in chronological order starting with the most recent event. The University of Washington’s Japanese Studies Program website also listed past events. The University of Washington website had all the past events displayed as links that opened the descriptions of the event when clicked on. Since there were different ways to display the same information, we had to make decisions on how we were going to design the *Japan @ WPI* website.

In addition to our research on websites, we talked to students to learn what users like and dislike about event displaying platforms. We wanted to know if we could incorporate features from other platforms onto the *Japan @ WPI* website. Clubs including the MSA, the HCSA, the KSA, and the JCC use a combination of social networking platforms and messaging applications to stay connected with the public and the club members on upcoming events. Each club often uses multiple

social networking platforms for getting events broadcasted. For instance, the JCC has its own Instagram and Facebook accounts. Currently, most clubs promote their events through their own social media accounts. At the same time, there is currently a lack of an event platform where each favorable feature we found from club members who regularly distribute events and reach out to audiences is covered. Therefore, clubs have had to advertise on different platforms based on the necessity of the event as well as the lack of consistency in services across social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram.

Club interviews suggest that Facebook and Outlook are notably popular among club members because they have an events page that allows for attendees to mark if they plan on attending an event. Students reported having a positive experience using these features to coordinate events and encourage both members and non-members to RSVP for events. Facebook's effective event feature allows people to save events and get notified. From our survey, about half of the participants ranked Instagram as a particularly useful platform. The reasons behind the large votes for Instagram are its concise layout, stories, and post functions. Instagram is used primarily for posting past and upcoming (permanent and temporary) events as well as hosting events via livestream.

According to Figure 3, six out of the seven club member respondents indicated that they use Instagram frequently in broadcasting their club's events and activities (Figure 3). When respondents were asked to state specific features of platforms that are favorable, 6 out of the 7 respondents mentioned Instagram's features which are particularly useful, including Instagram Stories and Instagram Live (Figure 4). These findings are highly significant because it supports our survey data and strengthens the conclusion that Instagram is the most effective platform for cultural clubs at WPI. Overall, we found that social media including Instagram and Facebook are channels students are more likely to use to find events compared to researching through the Internet or event-specific websites like Eventbrite.com. Our team learned that having a platform to display events and showcase past events was not effective without a voice for the platform through social media. We found that the event searching process is heavily affected by the user's habit of choosing social media to get connected to users and content daily. Due to these findings, our team decided that we should recommend a proper management plan that includes both the utilization of the website we built and suggested activity on Instagram and/or Facebook to inform the public on website updates.

Platform Use Among Cultural Club Members (n = 7)

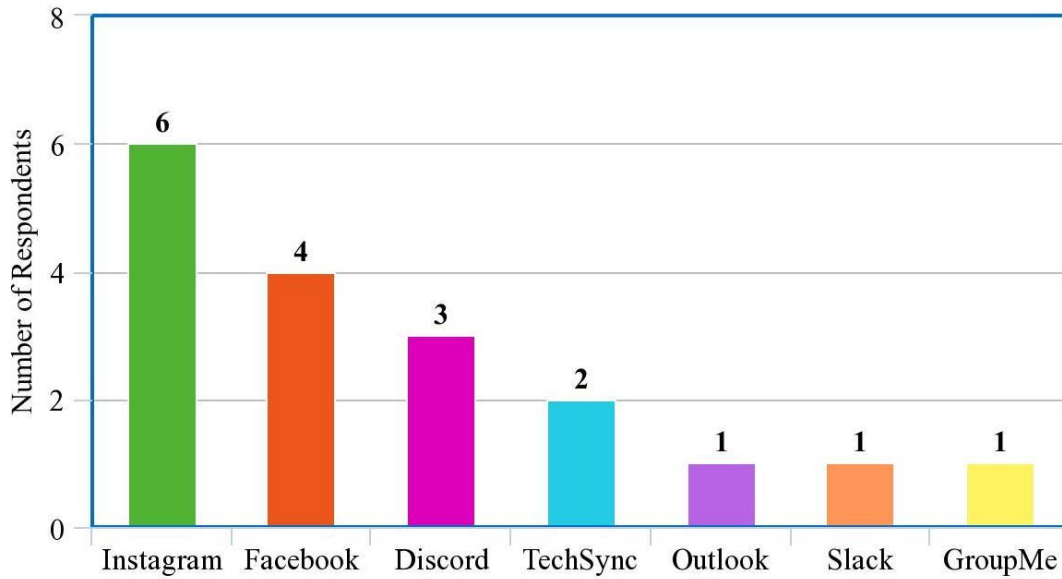


Figure 3 Platform Use Among Cultural Club Members (n = 7; More than one option chosen per participant)

Platforms with Features Mentioned Among Cultural Club Members (n = 7)

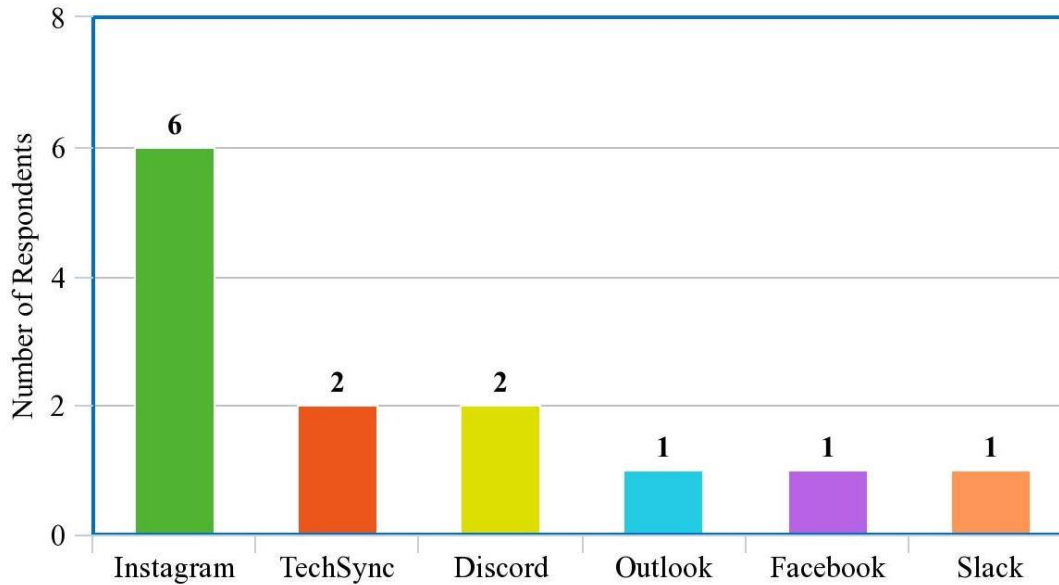


Figure 4 Platforms with Features Mentioned Among Cultural Club Members (n = 7; More than one option chosen per participant)

Based on the responses from the cultural club interviewees, Instagram is valuable because it has three different means of visualizing and sharing information. We found that each visualization, Instagram Posts, Instagram Stories, and Instagram

Live, respectively, represent posts that are permanent to showcase past events or a timeline, posts that are temporary for reminders of events, and live posts where events or discussions can take place in real time. With these conclusions, our team incorporated the idea of having featured events and past events in the platform we developed.

We found that “Instagram Stories” and “Instagram Live” were prevalent among our interview responses as features that help connect club members and attract new interested students to events. Platforms like Discord and Slack proved to not only be used for communication among current members of clubs, but also have a purpose of marketing events across social circles. For example, a club member can promote events from their club’s Slack channel to channels of other clubs they belong to. TechSync is a platform that allows cultural club members to take attendance and post events, yet most of the responses we collected mentioned other platforms were favored over TechSync in regard to posting events. We found that Outlook has both notifications and a calendar which make it convenient for sending instant announcements of events to students. In the survey, twelve people mentioned Outlook as “an event-displaying platform that is necessary to include.” We put their suggestions into consideration and found that it would be useful to allow for Outlook email announcements to students who subscribe to the Japanese events and opportunities website.

Our Decisions on the *Japan @ WPI* Website

We based most of our decisions on how the website would look and function based on other websites we saw as well as feedback and guidance from research participants and our sponsor, Prof. deWinter. Since our team found that there is a sizable number of events and opportunities in Massachusetts, more specifically the Greater Boston Area, we wanted to make sure that the categories we sorted these events into were clear and well defined on the *Japan @ WPI* website. Each piece of content on the webpage has a sensible location based on whether it fits as a one-time event or an opportunity of a permanent or recurring nature. We divided the website into five tabs, the Home, Opportunities, Media, About, and Contact tabs. The Opportunities tab is split into multiple webpages including the Calendar, All Categories, Upcoming Events, and Past Events pages. The Media tab is also divided into sections for each media element including the Featured Activity, Literature, Music, and Videos/Film pages.

Figuring out how to display all these sections together was key because we wanted those who were using this website to intuitively find everything on their own. We decided to create a mockup of the website to help organize our thoughts before we started developing the WordPress website. This mockup was created based on the inspiration we drew from all the other websites we reviewed, Prof. deWinter’s input on content and style, and our own preference on how things should look. We created and updated the mockup of the web platform using a cloud-based user interface (UI) tool called Figma. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate example pages from the mockup. Figure 5 represents the mockup of the platform’s Home page, which includes a featured event slideshow. Figure 6 represents the mockup for the platform’s tab for

opportunities. The mockup has changed based on our research on WordPress, its plugins, and its layouts that were available to us in the development phase. Editing the mockup during the data collection process allowed our team to draw more conclusions on the desired usability and UI of the web platform.

Since it took a week and half to gain developer rights and tools to edit the website, we decided to create the mockup with the layouts we took note of in our research on WordPress with the intention of using filters for searching through content. Once we began creating the website on WordPress, we realized the limitations of the platform.

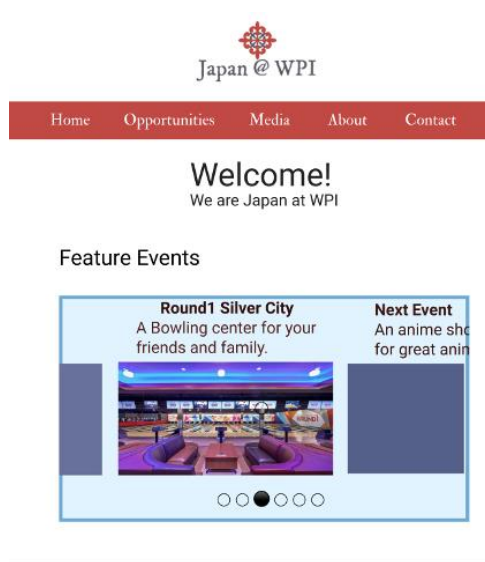


Figure 6 Mockup for Japan @ WPI's Home Page

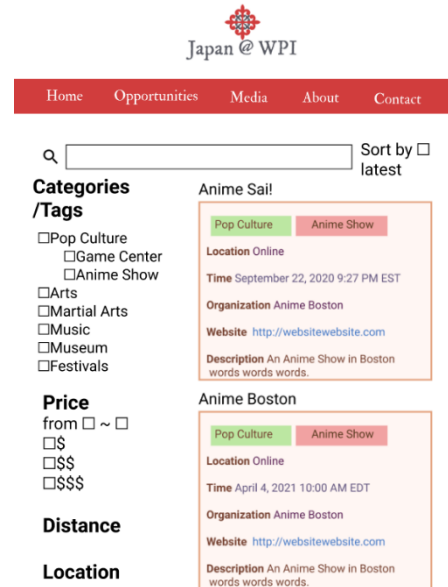


Figure 6 Mockup for Japan @ WPI's Opportunities Page

Displaying Content Intuitively

On the Home page, we decided to include an informational, introductory paragraph that explains what resources and opportunities the *Japan @ WPI* website contains. An important addition to the Home page was the featured events section. The decision to add this section came from the idea that people might not know where to start when looking for events. We found that displaying a few upcoming opportunities could pique people's interest and get them to check out similar events. To decide which events should be previewed compared to others, we reviewed the survey question about what categories of Japanese events interest people the most. As cuisine and popular culture events were the top two favorite categories, we decided to advise those maintaining the website to include at least one event under those categories in the featured events page to draw people to these events. We saw a featured content section on University of Washington's Japan Studies Program website which helped us decide how to design our own display of featured events.

When it came to the decision on how to display all events, WordPress's limitations changed our initial ideas. WordPress's plugin of "Calendar +" events was

useful because in addition to displaying the events as their own tiles, it also generated a calendar that displayed all the events with upcoming dates on it. This calendar was initially displayed at the bottom of the Home page because we wanted to highlight it as a key tool for users. However, after the pilot study we got suggestions to move the calendar to its own page because it was too low on the Home page and some people did not scroll down far enough to see it. This prompted our decision to create the new menu item called calendar under opportunities which moved the calendar to its own page.

The main page we created for displaying events is known as the “Upcoming Events” page. This page is generated by WordPress’s “Calendar +” plugin, which allows for a select few ways for us to display upcoming events. The display is an organized list of events in separate tiles with descriptions and the option to add the event to iCal, Outlook, or Google Calendar. The advanced search for events is a widget we decided to use that allows the user to navigate from a certain time frame and with specific categories. Because the pilot study participants found the labeling of this widget to be unclear in displaying the date, we used CSS to change the default labels that WordPress provides to indicate a date that field is present. We decided that since location is a major determining factor on student attendance in off-campus events and opportunities, we added a filter specifically for location. We included event details, cost, and other information in each event posting.

We made the decision to include a past events page after visiting both University of Washington’s Japan Studies Program website and University of Michigan’s Center for Japanese Studies website. Although the layouts are different, both websites include a section for past events. We figured this display is important to show the types of events WPI’s Japan website showcases as well as to indicate what events are popular or have had active participation of WPI students. We decided to adopt elements from university websites on Japanese cultural events and opportunities to create *Japan @ WPI’s* past event page. It is also important to leverage the website and highlight a unique platform within WPI. The past events page does this by highlighting interesting and fun opportunities to everyone, including prospective students.

When it was time to decide how we would organize all the information and opportunities we wanted to display, we realized we had some informational resources that might not fit in the opportunities section because they were not opportunities to attend but information to consume. The media section includes resources like books, music, and videos. We decided to add all these resources to their own section of media so that people who are interested can learn more about Japanese culture.

To ensure that the website can be as personalized as possible to the Japanese Culture Club, the expected caretakers of the website, we added another opportunity for promoting featured events on the Media tab called “Featured Activity.” This activity is promoted throughout every page of the *Japan @ WPI* website regardless of the webpage’s content. There is an image of a flyer or poster marketing the event and it encourages users to click on the poster which directs them to the featured activity webpage. The featured activity we decided to produce and hope that the JCC adopts is a book club with assigned reading in Japanese literature that is offered by the Gordon Library and other complementary resources. However, this is an idea and can

be easily changed by the editor of the website depending on what the featured activity in Japanese media is. Depending on the featured activity or event, the corresponding webpage and poster widget can be edited accordingly. We made this decision to articulate a more personalized feel that shows students' passion and engagement in Japanese cultural events. Highlighting that WPI students host Japanese events of their own is an impactful statement and testament to what *Japan @ WPI's* mission is, to connect WPI students to Japanese events and opportunities on and off campus.

In the literature section, there are links to posts about literature offered by the Gordon Library, Worcester Public Library, and other databases. There is also a section for past student reviews on literature that have been featured on the *Japan @ WPI* website. This allows for students to share their thoughts on any literature recommended by the website or to make any recommendations of their own. Finally, there are links to special collections from Gordon Library on Asian works as well as a database for more literature available to WPI students.

In the music section, we decided to create an interactive experience for people visiting *Japan @ WPI*. We have handpicked featured music and YouTube videos on Japanese traditional and pop music. WordPress provides a widget for Spotify, so we decided to take advantage of this and include a playlist from Spotify on JPop and JRock Japanese music. Users can listen to the playlist in their web browser or Spotify application while browsing through the *Japan @ WPI* website. The music section strengthens our mission to communicate to WPI students, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, that opportunities to immerse yourself in culture are limitless and everywhere.

In the videos/film section, we included multiple informational videos about traditional Japanese culture. The widgets in WordPress allowed us to insert the videos directly onto the page. We also added a link to all the other videos we wanted to include as posts at the top of the page. This is so we did not have too many videos on one page. There is also a link to a streaming platform called Alexander Street that allows you to search for Japanese films.

We found a better layout for the Contact page by changing the form of "Contact Us" to "Submit an Event," so it will request students' input to submit events and opportunities they are interested in. This change helps those maintaining the website keep up with new events that students are interested in. The form would be submitted to the caretakers of the website including the secretary of the JCC and Prof. deWinter through emails so that new and relevant events and opportunities can be added on the website. This feature is an outlet for WPI students to express their experiences in Japanese events and opportunities promoted by WPI. We decided that this way of displaying and sharing events is one of the most impactful ways because it adds more credibility to the event and has a greater likelihood to attract more students to a certain event. To give users the option to reach out to our team for questions and comments about the project and our initial development of the website, we included the About page which has our team's email alias and information about the team members and our contributions. As a result of finding out that a considerable number of students find it useful to receive Outlook updates and announcements for events, we added a widget on the Home page and Contact page for subscribing to the

Japan @ WPI website. Once any visitor of *Japan @ WPI* enters their email address, they will get notified of event updates that are made on the website.

Quick Navigation Options

Once we had all the information sectioned out and displayed, we wanted to make sure the events and opportunities were easy to navigate to. The menu bar at the top was helpful because people were able to find all the opportunities under the Opportunities section and any informational resources under Media. Although this section of the menu bar was useful, we decided to add the main categories of events and opportunities to the Home page to narrow down the searching process. We hoped this display would let people know what kinds of opportunities were being displayed on the website. We also thought the design of the All-Categories page under the Opportunities menu could look better as it was only text that linked to the various categories of opportunities. It had no images or description of what the distinct categories were. We decided to create a gallery of images that had links to individual pages for each of the main categories. This way we could organize the information the way we wanted and make it more appealing to users. The pages we made for all these main categories included subheadings to help organize all the information. We hoped the images and subcategory definitions allowed those using the website to find interesting Japanese opportunities. The pilot study proved that this way of navigation was useful as many participants clicked on them during the first 5 minutes while exploring the website and also used it to find the events we asked them to find in the pilot study questions.

We also acknowledged searching for events and content on our website was important so we included search bars at the top of the pages. We hoped this would assist those looking for a certain topic or event. However due to the organization of the events from the Calendar+ plugin and the normal posts of all events, we needed to include two search bars. We found out the normal search bar did not search for the plugin events which is why we had to include the search bar from the plugin. This was confusing for most participants of the pilot study because the difference between the search bars was not clear. Because of this, we labeled the event plugin search bar “Search for Future Events.” We also decided to remove the future events search bar from all pages except the Upcoming Events page to try to resolve that confusion.

User Interface (UI) Decisions

We found a better general layout of our website with CSS code added to the system that changed the styling including color, theme and button functions. The new theme with a crimson color matched with WPI’s official site’s main color. The button functions included the color change when the mouse hover on category gallery captions; they helped the users to know the exact category they were currently clicking up.

Even though most participants were really satisfied with our website, there were still quite a lot of features that we were not able to implement or improve on due to the limitation of the WordPress version we had access to. For example, the search bars on different pages were something we were unable to change, and the features of

those search bars were very limited. The built-in search bar from WordPress can only search for posts on the websites. In order to search for chronological events, the user must use the event search bar on the Upcoming events page. This event search bar came from the Calendar + plugin that we use to display the events and calendar on our website. It could only search for the future events since the plugin automatically deletes all the past events from the listing. In order to work around these issues, we posted every single event we found as dedicated posts on the website to make sure that the user can use the default search bar to look for what they want. Unfortunately, this increased the workload for future maintenance because every event needs to be published twice in both forms. Although it would be more work to maintain, we felt it was necessary to include both ways because they each had unique benefits.

In addition, as mentioned in our mockup, we planned to have an all-in-one page that not only displays the events, but also have the functionalities to filter and sort the information displayed on the website. However, since we cannot modify anything other than the styling on the Calendar+ page (upcoming event page), it was impossible to create such features on the website. We found quite a lot of third-party plugins for WordPress, however, it was simply not possible to utilize those third-party plugins and themes. This is due to the CampusPress version we were using, the version granted to WPI students with limited functionality.

Improvement Based on User Feedback on the *Japan @ WPI* Website

In order to collect user feedback, we conducted a pilot study that asked a group of potential users to go through every feature on the website. From the pilot study, we found out that the participants really liked the design of the navigation system during their testing process. The multiple methods to find information on the website made the information very accessible and searching process easy to learn. There are five elements of the event searching process being examined during the pilot study, the event calendar, the gallery-view of all main categories, the opportunities page which displays a complete list of categories, the website search bar which searches for all contents, and the event search bar which only searches for future events. With both the search bars and the gallery on the Home page, users could easily find events that they were looking for. There were also features like the calendar and the filters that simplified the searching even more. In addition, many of the participants complimented the consistent design of the tools available on the website to make the website look professional.

Users liked using the simplified method of finding events, such as a search bar or a list of all categories, when prompted to find a specific event or opportunity on a website. This is because it is much easier and convenient than scrolling through a whole list of events to find what you are looking for. When we conducted our pilot study, we asked our participants to find four types of events and gave them minimal guidance on how to find the events. All but one participant in our pilot study used a search bar to find at least one of the four events, which is 14 out of 15 participants. They preferred to use the search bar because they knew what they wanted to find, and the search bar could bring up that information quickly. Those that used the search bar

took less time to find the events than it did for those who scrolled through the categories of events to eventually come across the event we hoped they would find.

We found that people prefer having a calendar in a prominent designated area on the website to search for events. In the pilot study, interviewee mentioned it was “easier for them to use the calendar if it has its separate page.” We had the calendar on the Home page originally below the content of introduction, category gallery and featured events. In the video that we recorded to see how students navigated on our website for the first time, we found that they tended to go straight up to the category gallery to look for the events, so the calendar at the bottom of page may remain unnoticed or seemed less significant. The calendar feature was especially useful for searching events based on dates or a certain time frame, and its layout and features were self-explanatory and easy-to-learn for users. With an aim of making it more noticeable and easily for users to locate, we took the interviewee’s feedback and moved it to a separate page.

During the pilot study, there were also some details about the website being pointed out to be counterintuitive, for example, the two search bars with the headings that did not distinguish the difference. So, we changed the headings to make it clear that one search bar would “search for all content” and the other would just “search for future events.” We had fixed most of the features based on the feedback from pilot study. There were also some recommendations from the participants about the UI design details like links should open in new tabs, some hyperlinks were not clickable, the link to the recommended restaurants page was not noticeable enough, etc. Those issues were all covered during the website design revision after the pilot study.

Best Practices to Keep the Website Maintained

We made our maintenance decisions based on the mentioned interactions that interview participants had with the event platforms. Three out of the seven cultural club executive members whom we interviewed noted that they do not update their event platform of choice often. Most respondents claimed that when they do update their platforms it is by a “case by case basis.” This finding shows that club members are more willing to update websites that need minimal maintenance. With these responses taken into consideration, our team recognized that our event structure should be simple and not take too much time to update. Therefore, we have designed our platform to have a concise layout for easier maintenance. Also, having technical searching and categorizing methods leads to more efficient maintenance. When searching for new Japanese cultural events and opportunities to update the website, narrow and specific terms with categories generates better results than searching by broad terms. Updating the platform with events that the community is interested in would help keep current users on the website and attract new potential users. Based on our survey, the top two categories participants were interested in were cuisine with about 85% of participants interested and pop culture (Japanese popular culture that includes anime, comics, and games) with 80% of participants interested. Furthermore, to give the future website manager a clearer picture of how the platform works, we created a user manual (in a separate attachment) that has detailed procedures with pictures showing the steps. We also conducted a meeting with the current JCC

president, Mariko Endo, with our sponsor Prof. deWinter and came out a long-term maintenance plan. There is a paid secretary position for maintaining and updating the platform about 2 to 3 hours a month, while Mariko will take the position until the next election of JCC. A lot of events we found have been changed due to COVID-19 this year. Because of this, the manager of *Japan @ WPI* will take over and update these events when everything is back to normal.

Our findings regarding social media demonstrate that social media is indispensable when it comes to connecting students to events and opportunities, and in a similar sense, customized websites that outline and organize these opportunities create a personalized feel while delivering convenience. Four out of seven respondents from the cultural club interview indicate that both the type of event and its marketing have a strong influence on event popularity. Based on our data interpretation, it is rarely only the event itself that attracts new members or attendees. Members who are already familiar with the event are likely to attend the event, but without a popular event as well as the proper marketing for the event, it is less likely there will be a larger attendance with an exception to club member attendance. With this finding in mind, we gave students the ability to comment and interact with posts to provide further information and marketing on events and opportunities. This finding is a significant one in our project because it contributes to having an accessible platform that is actively updated and mentioned on social media for WPI students to enjoy. Based on this finding, we gave a recommendation to JCC and future maintenance teams.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Due to the limited function of CampusPress, which we had access to, we would recommend that in order to improve the visual appearance and enrich the functionality, the website could be further improved by CSS coding. However, we understand this could be a significant amount of work needed. We also recommended that the website's content management system could be transferred to a system of higher quality such as SquareSpace or WordPress Pro if possible. In that case, with the help of third-party plugins and an enormous list of themes and templates available, it could make the website look more visually appealing and achieve the designed functions which made the website even easier to use.

We recommended to the future maintenance group to post updates on any new events and opportunities on social media platforms alongside the website we developed. This could increase the exposure of Japanese cultural events and our website. This would not increase the workload of the maintenance group by a significant amount. Based on our interview with executive team members of the cultural clubs in WPI, it is easy and should not consume a significant amount of time to update posts on social media when the details are pre-written for displaying on the website. We would also recommend posting the link of the website, <https://wp.wpi.edu/japanatwpi/>, in various places for students to easily access it. Our team compiled a list of locations for where we suggest the link should be placed. This list is in Appendix H.

We believe that our deliverables of the *Japan @ WPI* website, a maintenance manual and plan on website upkeep, and our recommendations for promoting the website will help connect more students to Japanese events and opportunities near the Worcester area. Our team hopes that *Japan @ WPI* and our research on its importance encourages other cultural clubs to display events and opportunities off campus in a similar fashion on websites of their own. We look forward to seeing how the website progresses and believe that the JCC will fulfill the role of maintaining the website with creativity and passion.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview with JCC Members to Collect information on Japanese Cultural Opportunities

Preamble

We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute. We are conducting interviews with JCC members. From this interview, we will collect the categories that are missing from the list that we generated from previous research so that we can generate a more complete list of Japanese cultural events at and near WPI. We are working with the Japan Project Center to accomplish our goal and your insights will be extremely useful.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. We expect the interview to take about fifteen minutes in total. If you would like, we would be happy to make your comments confidential, though it would be useful for us to establish credibility with those who will interact with our project.

If interested, a copy of our results can be requested at the conclusion of the study and provided via email. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Interview questions

1. What is your role at the JCC?
2. What types of Japanese cultural opportunities and events interest you?
 - a) Here is the list of categories we have compiled in our previous research in Objective 1, Method 1. Are there any other categories that you could think of that is not included in the list?
3. What is your experience with searching for Japanese cultural opportunities within or around WPI? (follow up questions depends on interviewees' answers)
 - a) If you have not been to any of those opportunities, what would motivate you to participate in those events?
 - b) Have you encountered any trouble finding those Japanese cultural events in Massachusetts?

Appendix B: Joint Survey with Students Who Attended or Applied for Projects from the Japan Project Center to Collect Information on Japanese Cultural Opportunities Categories

Preamble

We are building a website to display Japanese cultural events for WPI community. This survey is going to ask for your interests with Japanese cultural events.

- Duration: 10 Minutes
- Participation: Voluntary, withdraw any time, and anonymous

We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute. We are conducting a survey with students who attended or applied for projects from the Japan Project Center to evaluate the effectiveness of event platforms so that we can develop a platform that exposes students to Japanese cultural events at and near WPI. We are working with the Japan Project Center to accomplish our goal and your insights will be extremely useful. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Survey questions

1. Which Japan project did you attend/apply? IQP, MQP, or HUA?
2. Below is a list of categories of Japanese events and opportunities. Which categories are you interested in? Are there any other categories that you could think of that are not included in the list? Check all that apply.
 - a) Pop Culture (Anime, Cosplay, Books, Games)
 - b) Shops (Fashion, Gifts, Supermarkets)
 - c) Cuisine (Restaurants, Cookbooks, Classes)
 - d) Museum Exhibitions
 - e) Classes (Culture, History, Language)
 - f) Music (Shamisen, Koto)
 - g) Arts (Ikebana, Bonsai, Taiko, Calligraphy)
 - h) Martial Arts (Shotokan, Kyudo, Kendo, Jiu-Jitsu)
 - i) Festival (Cherry Blossom Viewing, National Children's Day)
 - j) Other(s)
3. Have you ever tried to find any Japanese cultural events/opportunities in or around WPI? Yes or No.
 - a) What is your experience with searching for Japanese cultural opportunities within or around WPI? Are those events easy to find? Were you able to find all of the events you are interested in?
 1. What Japanese cultural events have you attended? If you have never attended any events, what would motivate you to participate in Japanese cultural events? For example: Readily available transportation to event locations, Relatively affordable cost of events, Knowing others going to the events, etc. If you have ever encountered any difficulties while searching for events, what were the problems?

2. If you have ever encountered any difficulties while searching for events, what were the problems? For example, cannot find with Google, Disorganized site, Website discontinued, No links for contact information, etc.
 - b) If you have not searched for any of those opportunities, what would motivate you to participate in Japanese cultural events?
For example: readily available transportation to event locations, relatively affordable cost of events, knowing others going to the events, etc.
4. Is there any other information or comments that you want to include? For example: Any Japanese cultural events that you are particularly interested in to include on our website.

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview with Club Members to Evaluate Current Platform Effectiveness

Preamble

We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute. We are conducting interviews with cultural clubs, organizations, and communities to evaluate the effectiveness of event platforms so that we can develop a platform that exposes students to Japanese cultural events at and near WPI. We are working with the Japan Project Center to accomplish our goal and your insights will be extremely useful.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. We expect the interview to take about thirty minutes in total. If you would like, we would be happy to make your comments confidential, though it would be useful for us to establish credibility with those who will interact with our project.

If interested, a copy of our results can be requested at the conclusion of the study and provided via email. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Interview Questions

1. What is your position(s) in the cultural club(s)? Does your position(s) grant you access to club event attendance data? If so, would you be willing to share this data?
2. How many events does your club(s) host each year? What events are most popular among the club members based on attendance numbers?
3. Do you think the event itself (People are aware of the event and are already interested in the event since it is popular) or its marketing (People who are unaware about the event are attracted to it based on effective marketing strategies) affects the popularity of those events?
4. Do students who are not a part of your culture attend your events? If so, which events do they attend?
5. Which platforms do you recognize from this list and which platforms does your club use:
 - Facebook
 - Instagram
 - Twitter
 - Reddit
 - Slack
 - Discord
 - Microsoft Teams
 - WhatsApp
 - Line
 - EventBrite.com
 - TechSync
 - Website

- a) Are there any other platforms for displaying events/information about opportunities that are not in the list that you think are worth mentioning?
 - b) What features of the platforms listed does your club use? What do you like about these features?
6. We are building a platform to display Japanese cultural events for WPI students. We are conducting a 30-minute pilot study with the platform that we build for our project. It will be in about two weeks from now. Would you help us out by attending this pilot study? We would appreciate your participation.

Appendix D: Joint Survey with Non-Club Members Who Attended or Applied for Projects in the Japan Project Center to Evaluate Current Platform Effectiveness

Preamble

We are building a website to display Japanese cultural events for WPI community. This survey is going to ask for your opinion on existing event displaying platforms.

- Duration: 10 Minutes
- Participation: Voluntary, withdraw any time, and anonymous

We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute. We are conducting a survey with students who attended or applied for projects from the Japan Project Center to evaluate the effectiveness of event platforms so that we can develop a platform that exposes students to Japanese cultural events at and near WPI. We are working with the Japan Project Center to accomplish our goal and your insights will be extremely useful. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Survey Questions

1. Which event displaying platforms do you recognize from the following list and which ones do you use to find cultural events? Please rate them from being not helpful at all to very useful, N/A if you have never heard of the platform.
 - Facebook
 - Instagram
 - Twitter
 - Reddit
 - Slack
 - Discord
 - Microsoft Teams
 - WhatsApp
 - Line
 - EventBrite.com
 - TechSync
 - Website
 - a) List the best features from the platforms that you gave a rating of "Somewhat useful" and "Very useful". (For example: Instagram Stories, Dedicated channels in Slack, etc.)
 - b) Are there any other platforms and/or features that you would like to have during your event searching process that is not mentioned in the above questions?
2. We are building a platform to display Japanese cultural events for WPI students. We are conducting a 30-minute trial with our website design next week. Your input will be invaluable for shaping our final product. Are you

willing to attend this pilot study? Please enter your email if you would like to participate in the pilot study. We would appreciate your participation.

Appendix E: Pilot Study with Selected Interviewees from Previous Interview to Evaluate Project Platform Questions

Preamble

We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts. We are conducting a pilot study with cultural clubs and other organizations in hopes of collecting opinions on *Japan @ WPI*, a website to display Japanese events for the WPI community. We will examine and analyze your feedback to better organize Japanese cultural opportunities presented to the WPI community. During the pilot study, information regarding current roles in clubs will be taken into consideration in order to produce a more meaningful conclusion on our platform's effectiveness.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. We expect the pilot study to last about thirty minutes in total. If you would like, your comments will be confidential, though it would be useful for us to establish credibility with those who will interact with our project.

If interested, a copy of our results can be requested at the conclusion of the study and provided via email. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Pilot Study Questions

1. What are your initial opinions on this platform?
2. Please find these events using the platform and rate ease of accessibility on a scale of 1 being "Extremely Difficult to Find" to 5 being "Extremely Easy to Find". Speak aloud as you do it with any feedback you have on the usability. Did you have any trouble finding a specific event?
 - a) Find the Japan Festival Boston event. How easy was it to find? Did you use the search bar or category navigation?
 - b) Find an event in the Shotokan Karate category. How easy was it to find? Did you use the search bar or category navigation?
 - c) Find a restaurant in Worcester. How easy was it to find? Did you use the search bar or category navigation?
 - d) Find an event in 2021. How easy was it to find? Did you use the search bar or category navigation?
3. What is your overall feedback on the usability of this platform? Are there any features that you believe are missing or need to be improved on?
4. Where do you think this website should be linked for people to access it? For example, linked to social media accounts like JCC's Facebook or Instagram, or on the library website.
5. Have you searched for Japanese cultural events in the past?
 - a) If yes, how does our website compare to the platforms you used to find Japanese events?
 - b) If no, why?
6. Do you think that students would use this platform for finding Japanese events, why? Would YOU use this platform to find Japanese events? Would you attend any of these events? Why or why not?

7. Any final suggestions/feedback?

Appendix F: Semi-Structured Interview with JCC to Talk About Future Maintenance of the Platform

Preamble

We are a group of students working on our IQP project with the Japan Project Center. We are conducting interviews to create a future management plan in order to maintain the website. We will provide a manual on how to update the *Japan @ WPI* website through WordPress our platform so that your club can connect WPI students with Japanese cultural events. We would appreciate your interest and participation.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. We expect the interview to take about thirty minutes in total.

Interview Procedures

1. Show JCC president Mariko Endo and JCC advisor Prof. Jennifer deWinter the website.
2. Ask JCC if they will take over the maintenance.
3. Ask if they will adopt the featured events from JCC page.
4. Go through the manual.
5. Ask Prof. Jennifer deWinter if she is willing to pay for a maintenance position.

Appendix G: Sample of Spreadsheet Used to Organize Events

Note: See attachment for full spreadsheet

Category	Title	Link	Organization	Location	Time	Cost	Description
Anime Show	Anime Sai	https://www.animeboston.com/news/article/824	Anime Boston	Online	September 22, 2020 9:27 PM EST	Free	Anime Boston and The Japan Society of Boston are happy to co-host Anime 祭 (sai) — a whole day of Japanese-related activities all online!
Arts, Bunraku	YouTube Video on Bunraku	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4G68civvo8		Online			Video explains how the puppets work and what goes into a Bunraku show.
Arts, Pottery	The Prehistoric Jomon Pottery of Japan: Ancient Art through Archaeology	https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-prehistoric-jomon-pottery-of-japan-ancient-art-through-archaeology-tickets-127493461375?aff=erexpmlt	Japan Information & Culture Center, Embassy of Japan	Online	11/19/2020 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM EST	Free	Learn about the ancient Jomon people who were making the myriad pottery designs that we see today in museums in Japan and the world.
Cuisine, Class	Easy Japanese Home Cooking for Non-Chefs - Part 6	https://www.japanocietyboston.org/event-3997192	Japan Society of Boston	Online - Zoom	11/14/2020 5-6pm	\$10 for member \$15 for non-member	Make Sukiyaki (すき焼き) is a Japanese hot pot dish that consists of meat and vegetables slowly simmered in a mirin sauce from home

Appendix H: Recommendations for the Location of *Japan @ WPI*'s Link

Locations for *Japan @ WPI*'s link:

- On the WPI eProjects Japan Project Center website
- In the email signatures of Japanese Culture Club (JCC) executive members and advisor, Prof. deWinter
- In the Instagram bio of the JCC's Instagram page
- In any JCC Instagram posts or stories about updates to the website
- On the Interdisciplinary and Global Studies Department, Global Project Program, and Global Lab webpages
- On the @wpiglobal and @wpi_global_lab Instagram Pages as a story or post
- On the Student Activities Office's social media and web pages about clubs
- On WPI's general social media pages as a featured story or post