How Your Users Help You: A Survey of Feedback Mechanism in Social Network Sites

Jing Li

Abstract

Online Feedback Mechanism becomes more important along with the development of Social Network Sites. Traditional online feedback mechanism prove the significance for online shopping systems, it should have new forms in social networks sites which have striking numbers of active users. This survey makes observation of feedback mechanism of existing main stream social network sites and talk about the possibility to apply elements among these mechanism and design advice for feedback mechanism in an academic adaptive system, Conference Navigator.

Introduction

Online feedback of website is not a hot topic in social network or interactive system research, however, it is especial important for such kind of websites whose primary objective is to break these barriers between peoples. Feedback Mechanism is the most efficient way for developers or managers of these websites since users of these social network sites have integrated SNS activities into their daily life and vast quantities of users could make feedback mechanism more significant. According to empirical research in HCI or UI design, feedback mechanism could be designed as a sub-system of any interactive system and it could be built up with many components and it appears more sophisticated with the increasing huge

amount of new information technology. Meanwhile, with the success of commercial model of social website, more and more similar websites had been set up and their feature design also get assimilation as more standardized. In that case, feedback mechanism should be paid more attention at the level of an independent research topic for social network sites. In this survey, I will generally introduce feedback mechanisms in some most popular social network websites with different types and our interactive system conference navigator in first part. Follow the first part, in second one I would exam components of this mechanism and analyze characters and feature of them. From usability perspective, I would exam how to construct our own feedback mechanism in Conference Navigator 3.0(CN3) system with reference of analysis above in third part. Finally, I would like to make brief reflection that how to build a feedback mechanism for online websites.

I.   Feedback Systems in Social Networks Sites

Social network sites could be defined as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded systems, articulate list of other users with whom they share a connection and vie and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Boyd 2008)

Feedback Mechanism in these websites maybe not the most crucial features but it is absolutely an indispensible one. Facebook, for instance, has 800 million active users and 50% of them log on the Facebook in any given day and average friends numbers of these users are 130. In this context, administrator of Facebook will face unexpected horrible situation without a health and effective feedback mechanism. When something does no work on their website, even the consulting message or call will make representative who is in charge about users support cry.

Not only the amazing numbers of active users is significant for development of a social network site, but also the primary service goal is the heart of a successful social network. Myriad communication activities happened everyday with different purpose of people. It is nature to see more diverse type of social network sites emerge during this decade. Feedback mechanism should have general standards or similarities and it also could have variant in different social network sites based on their objectives.

Here I select some social network sites with different types to introduce the most characteristic element of their feedback system.

1. **Facebook**

   Facebook have a link called 'help' located at the right down corner of their site where a place is not easy to notice. In their help center, instruction page link, forum and feedback link, Facebook help feed form their help system. And Facebook feedback mechanism was embedded in this help system.
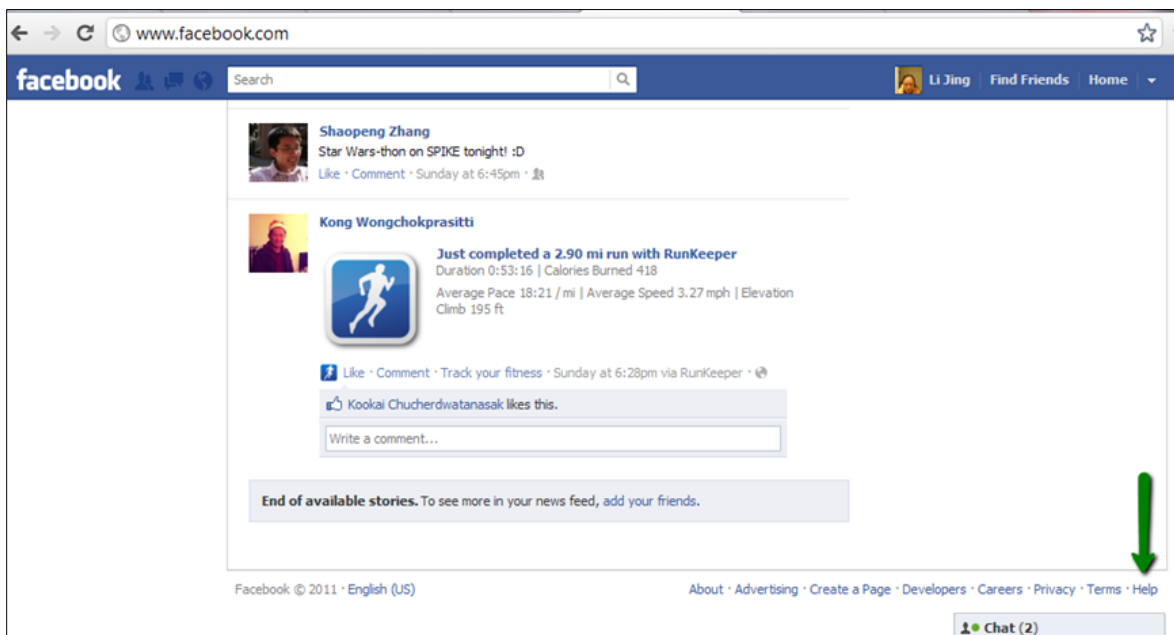

Figure1. Facebook help link

Like one of them called 'something's not working', you could find links for reporting broken feature in its page. However, it is not a strictly direct feedback method for users because it is still a list of bugs may happened and solutions if you click the broken feature name. The more further interactive part could be the buttons for users to choose Yes or No to answer whether these information help them, if not they provide some categories or predefined situation as reasons and users could click that reason for useless help and send a feedback in the same time. Actually, that is more like a reasonable way to improve a help document or instruction page for a social network site.
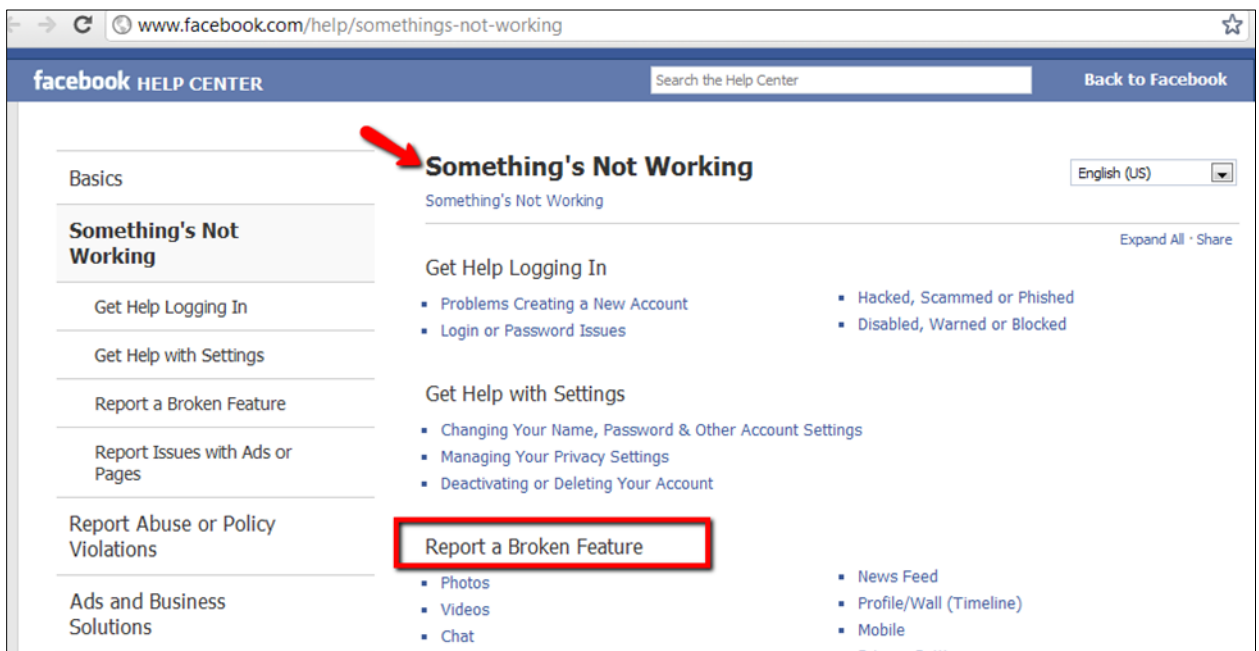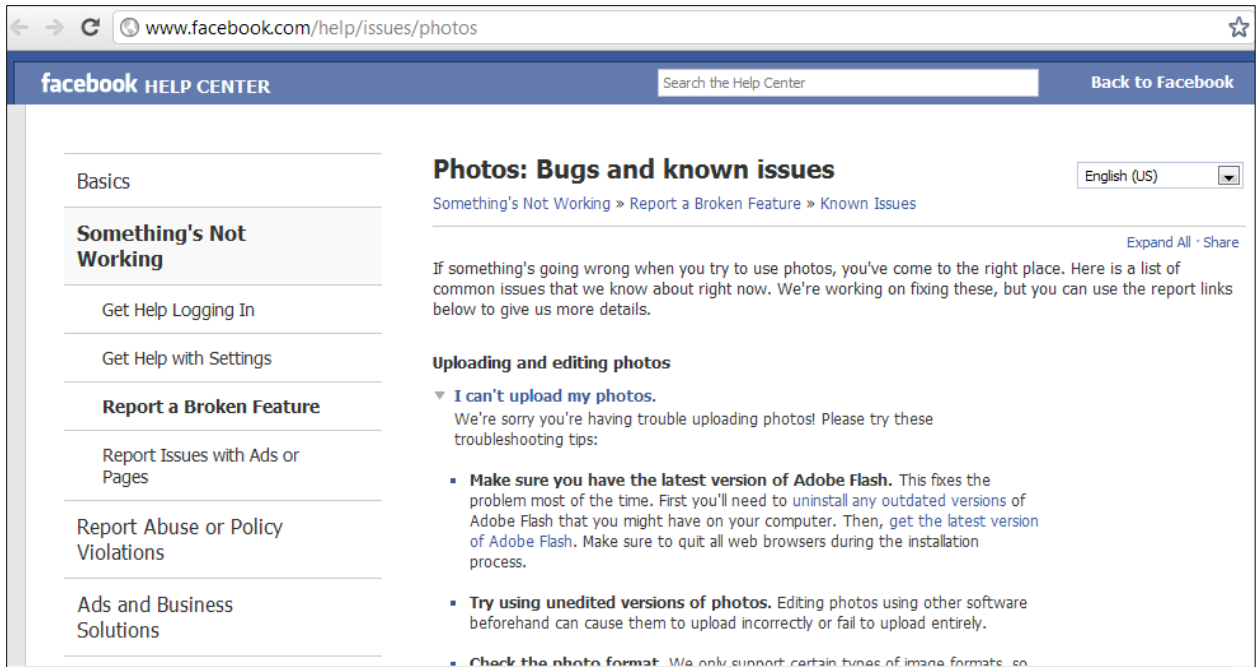
Figure2-3. Facebook bug issue report page

Another method is relatively independent for users to report a bug from 'Basic' help page. If basic help information is not sufficient for users to solve problems, user could report bug directly through a link on that page. And you could be load to a page which just for that type of problems and you could make description in the text area and upload a screen shot in order to make things more clearly.
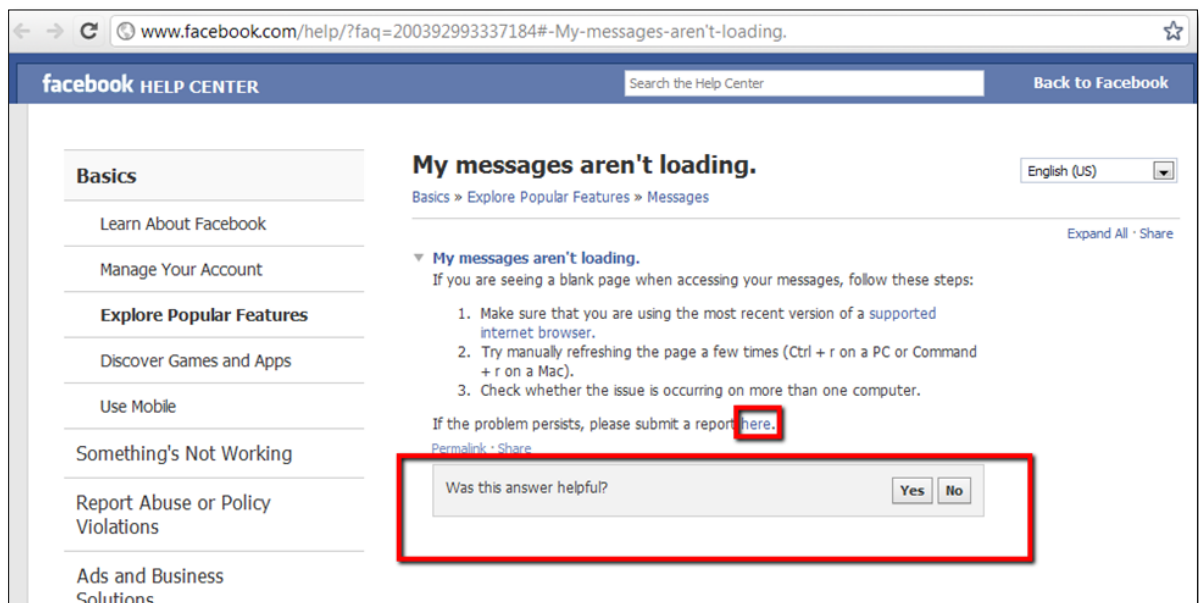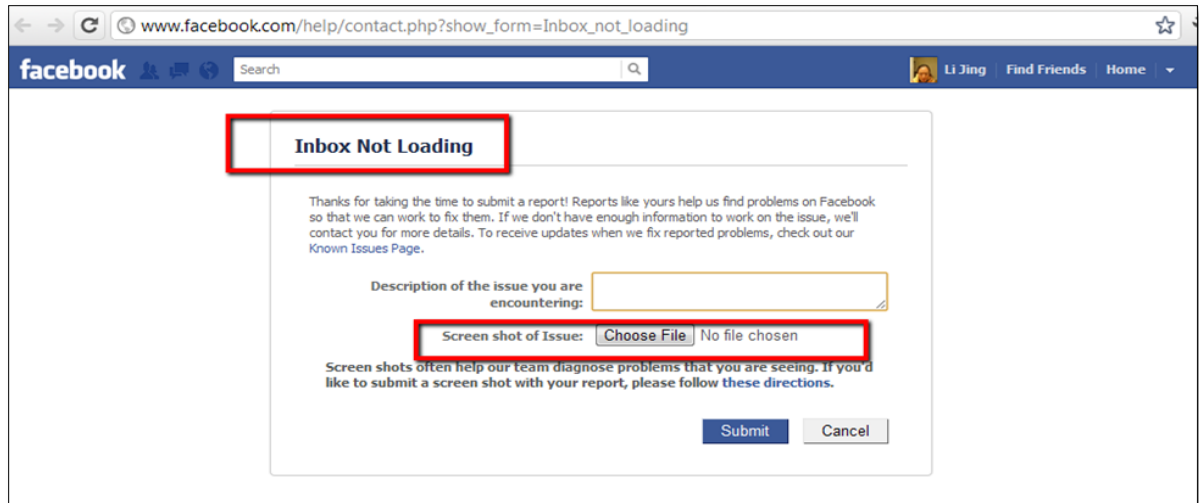
Figure 4-5. Facebook 'Basic' feedback link

Facebook also open two pages called 'Facebook Tip' and 'Know Issues on Facebook' as help feed to support users and feedback from developers to published the latest fixed problems.

Besides reply from developers of fixed bugs, users could get help in inter personal way on help forum which play a role as Q&A sites, and everyone could see who answer your questions using the name they registered on Facebook. On the forum, user could get addition answer options of their feedback or suggestion to the websites and they even could choose more trustable answers depending on the evaluation of a specific answerer.
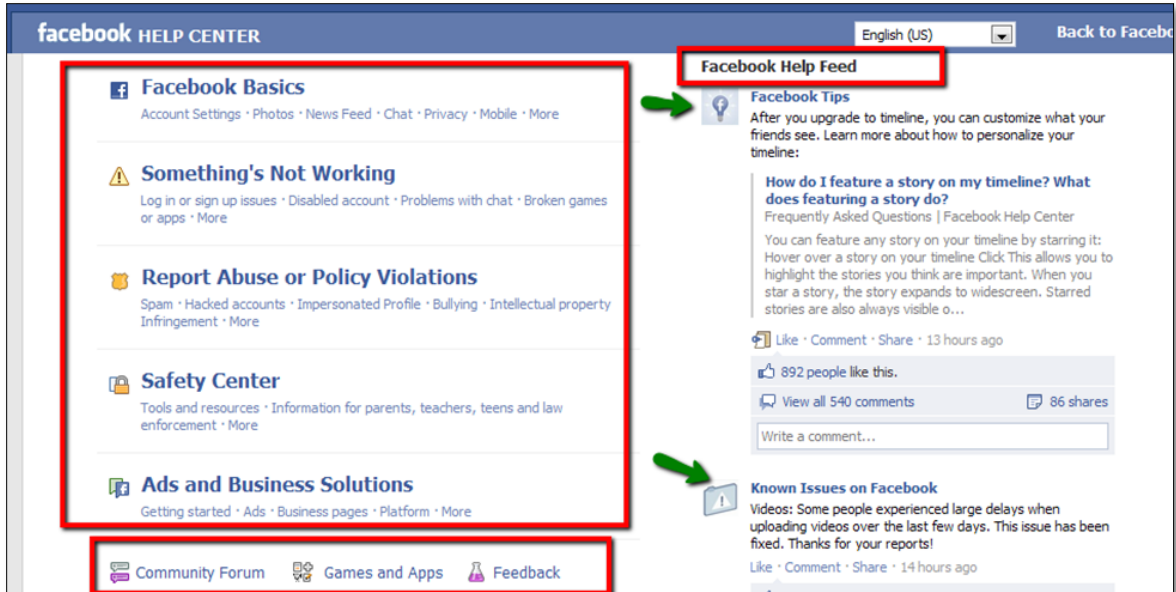
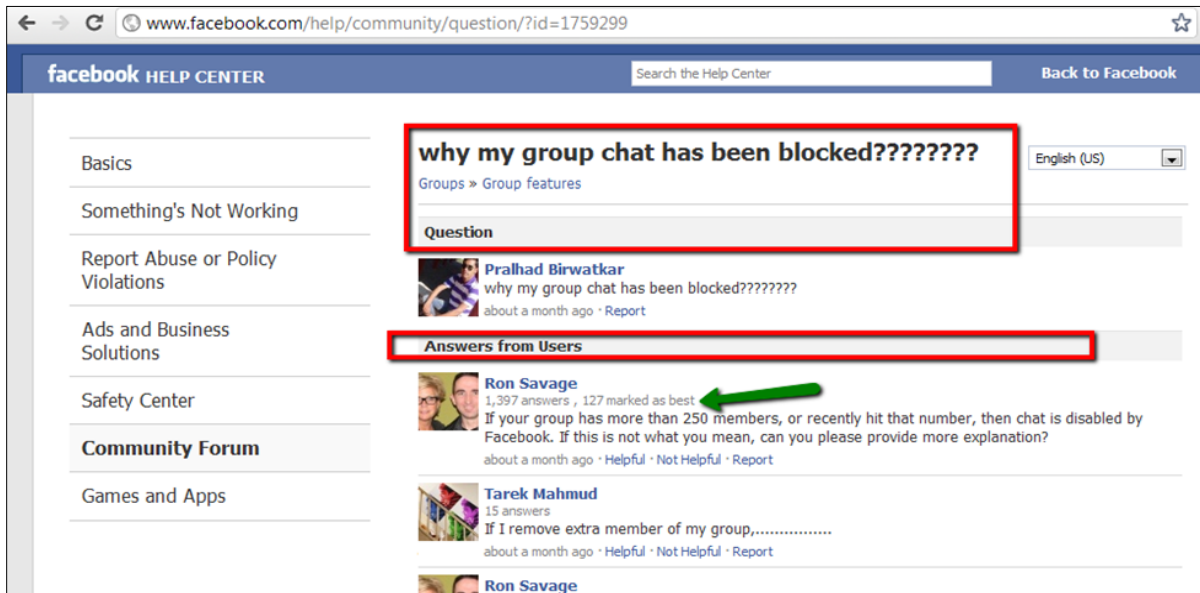Figure6. Facebook Feedback methods
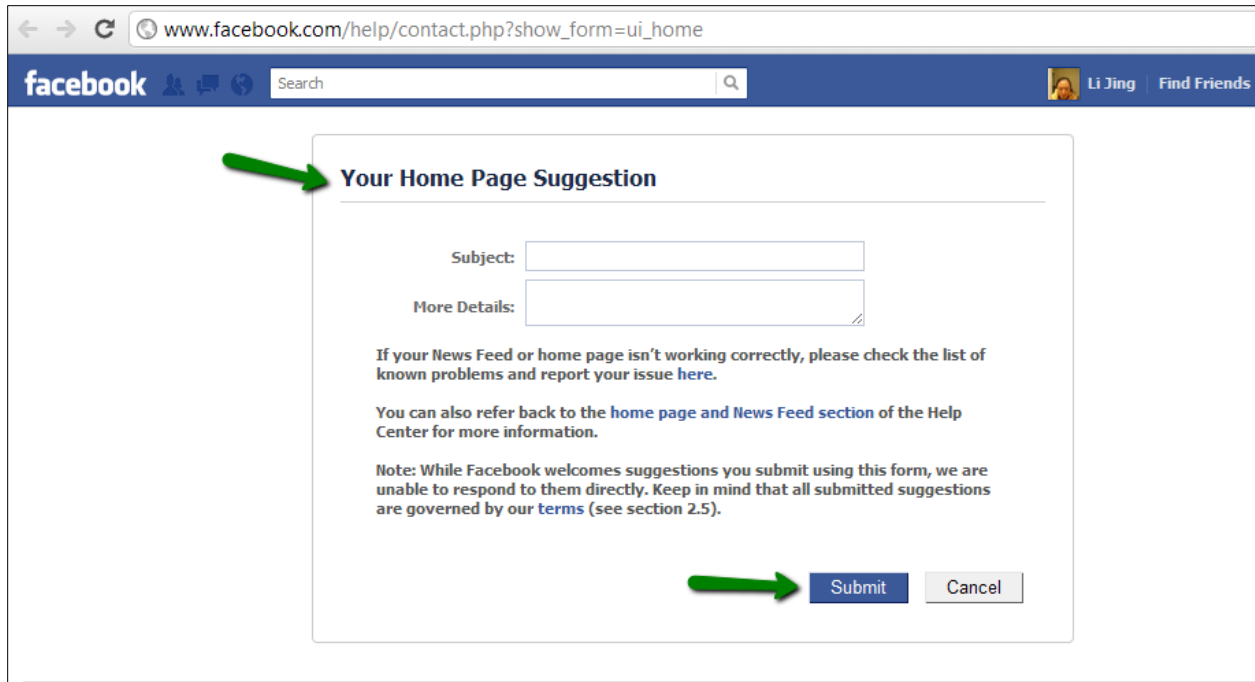

Figure 7. Facebook feedback forum

Figure8. Facebook suggestion tool

2. Twitter

Twitter has the features like share video and pictures, got list of friends, etc. Its main feature is to publish short message which make it more like a personal broadcasting media plant. Facebook is not alone for twitter got a similar help center if you could find a link at the right part of its front page.

Twitter also have Yes or No button for users on their help instruction page. Unlike predefined unsatisfied situation in Facebook feedback mechanism, twitter allow user to write suggestion in their own language if they want to help improve the help information.
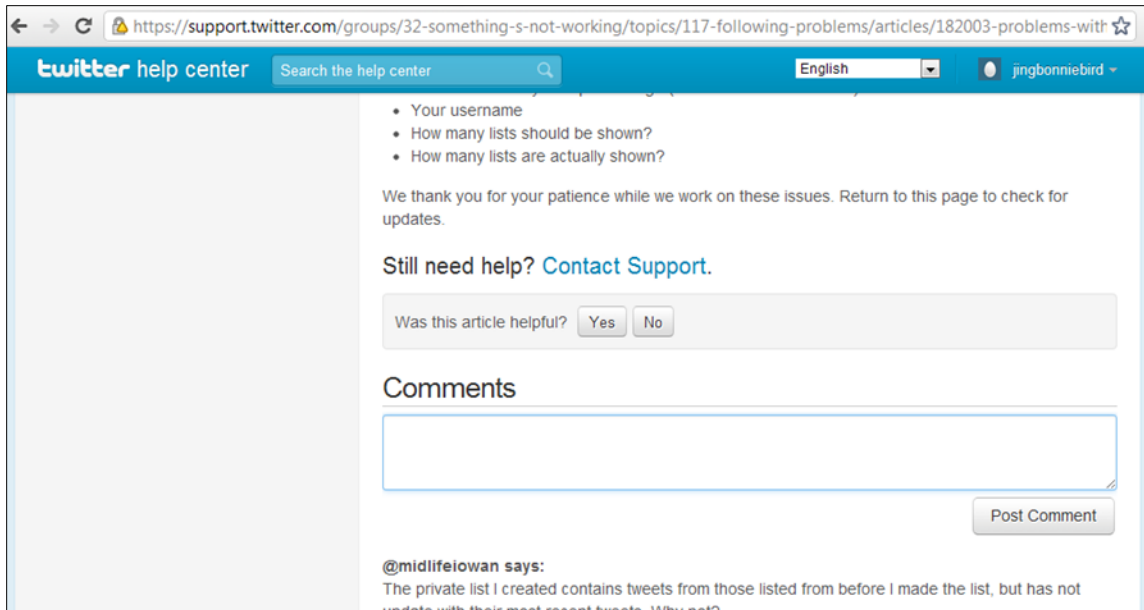
Figure 9. Twitter help page with Y/N button

On the help page, twitter adds a link called 'contact support' for users who still need help. After clicking this link, not only could user report a more detailed problems they encounter, but also twitter provide the way user could solve their problem directly. Like user could not login using a new account, this page provide a button for users to set new password and also have options for users to select a more specific situation that they could not login and provide more personal information, detail narrative in lists of blank text areas. I think that is a good design to kill two birds with one stone, it could help users in the most possible way and collect feedback in the same time.
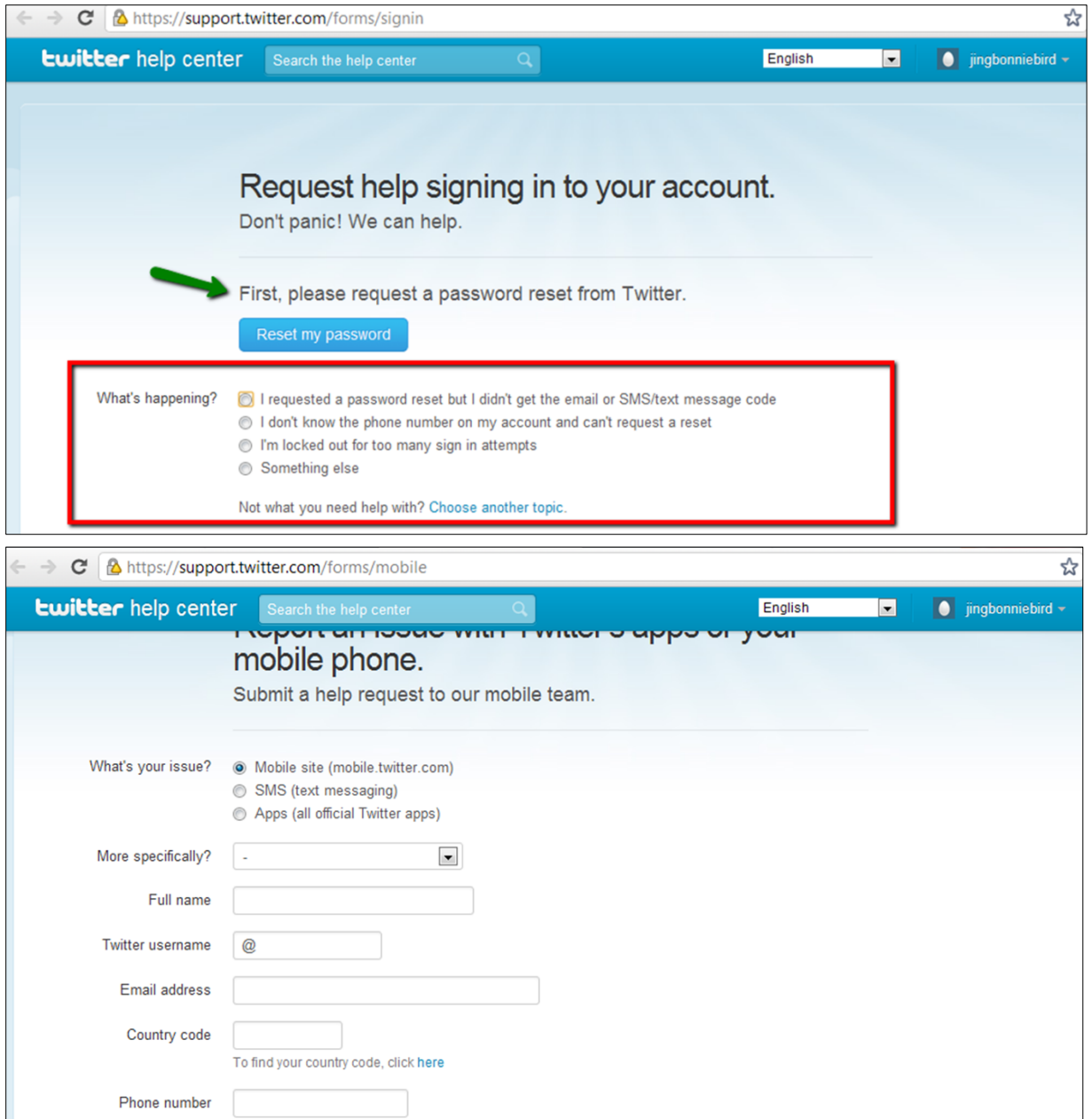
Figure 10-11. Twitter contact support pages

As help feed, twitter also set two account called 'support' and 'feedback' to provide technical help online and publish their proceeding of bug treatment. Users could follow these accounts' page to send and receive the latest feedback of themselves or developers.

Twitter did not user forum as the internal feedback communication mechanism, they use a status blog instead of forum, use specific

issues from users' feedback instead of questions or topic on forums. Twitter got several posts in the page, and each post got their status: problem solved or not, numbers of users tweet this problem, time of this problem reported and content of that issue. That is an easy way to make statistics about how many users focus on a problem just by clicking 'tweet' button under that issue.
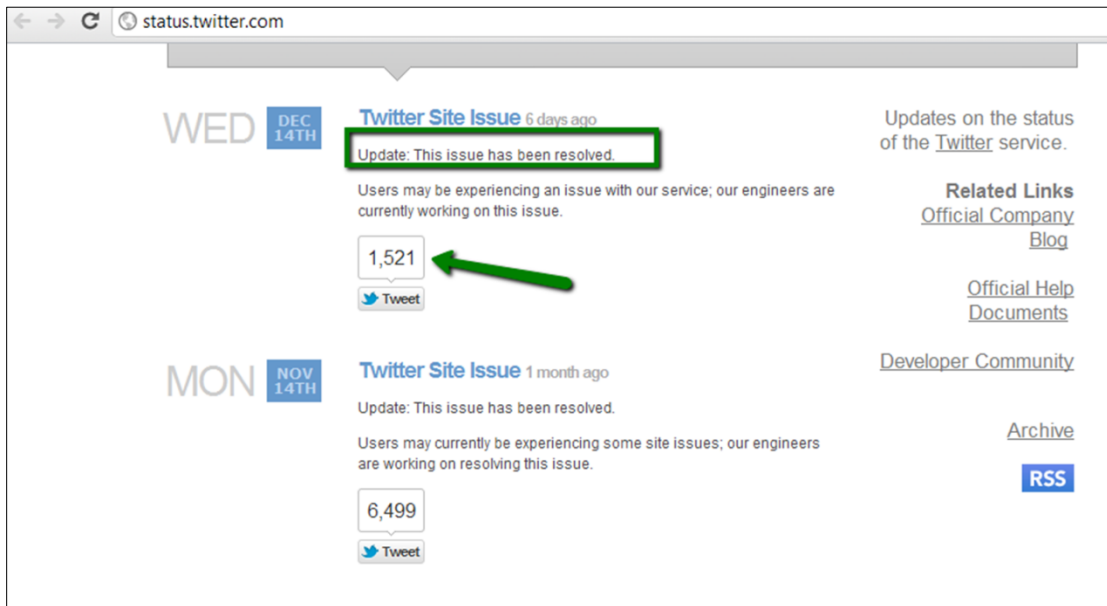

Figure 12. Twitter status page

3. **YouTube**

YouTube play a special role for video broadcasting in this decade. Users could set their own channel with video they upload or shared and receive comments by other users. Feedback mechanism was comparatively simple from the service form of this website. They employ a Google feedback tool at any page of their sites. This tool called 'send feedback' and it could pop up a window for submit feedback content. Users could make highlight of the existing page where problem appeared and black out personal information, in the preview page, users could see all current information of that page they are browsing, make word description and add screen shot to their bug report.

This feedback tool actually is kind of screen shot tool, or rather a upgraded screen shot tool with new capture feature of current page information and text editing area.

As supporting part, YouTube also has help center, in their help system, the most directly feedback collection tool is report button in 'current site issue' page, user could just press 'report' button located at issues described by YouTube and report it. Forum and help channel comment for help seem to be traditional ways for users to send feedback.
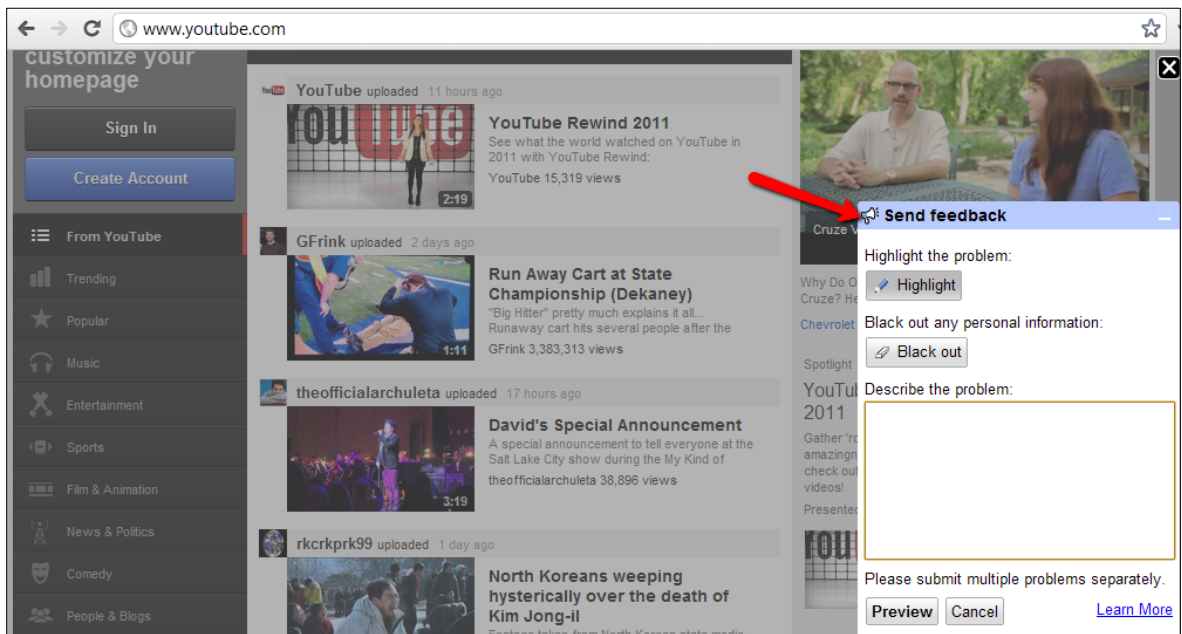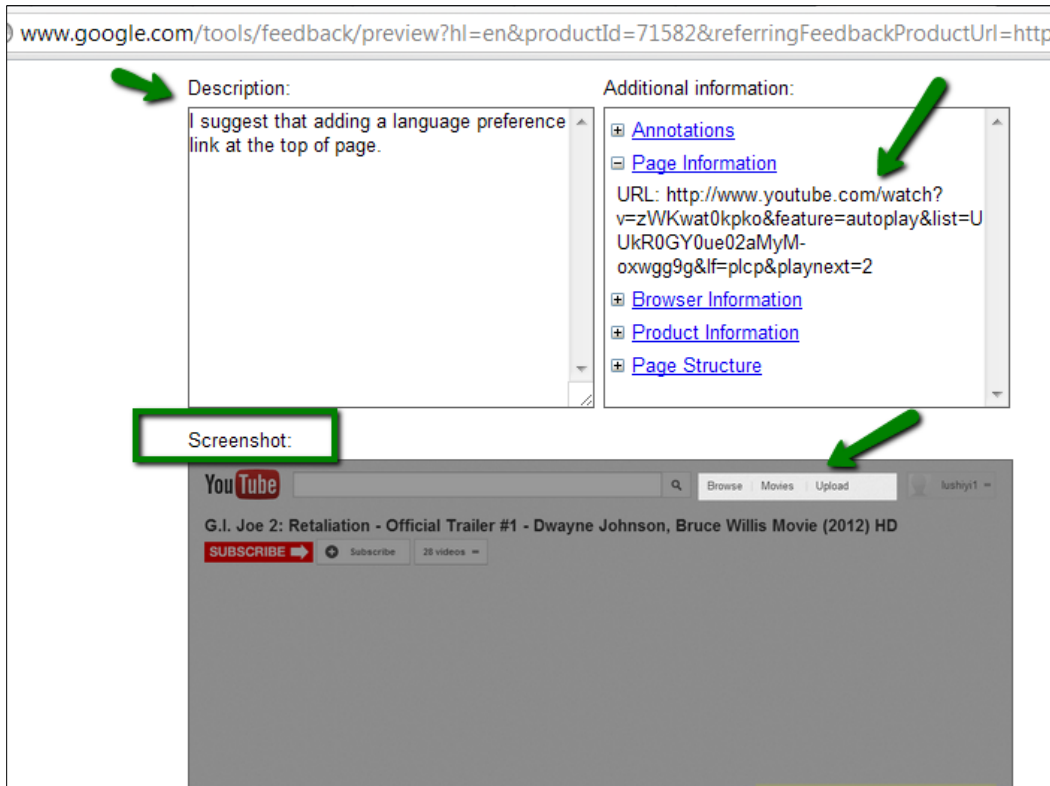
Figure 13-14 YouTube feedback tool

4. LinkedIn

LinkedIn, the world largest professional social network site set its characteristics apart from other social network sites and got distinctive objective that help users to set up professional networks in fields they worked on.

In its help center, users could search questions and seed the top answers of question history. I could only find 'Support history' and 'Contact Us' after enter something in the search bar.   'Support history' is the about support information this user provided to others' question and if users send feedback in the way of following some answers before, it will be shown on your support history page. 'Contact Us' could provide user as a standard bug report tool, it list some issue types in this page and users also could attach document with their own reports.

Yes and No button also appeared on LinkedIn answers page. They are applied for users' instant evaluation of an answer.
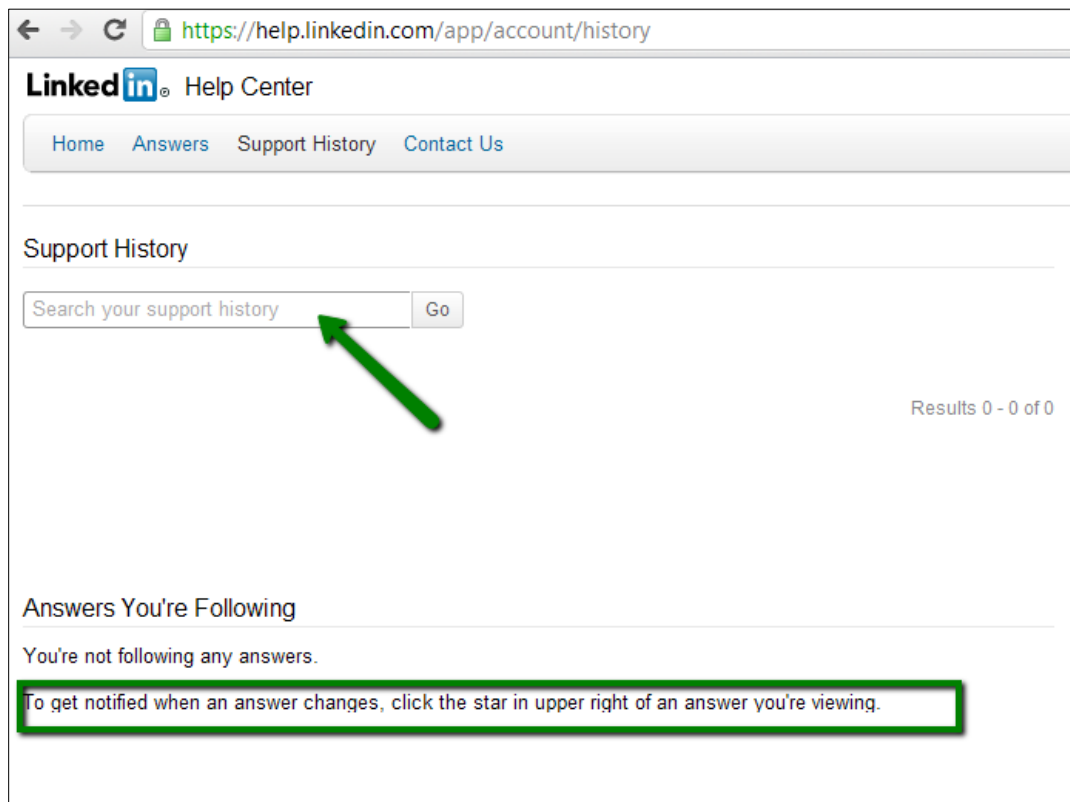

Figure15. LinkedIn support history page

Figure16. LinkedIn submit feedback page

5. Mendeley and CN3

The reason why I arrange these two websites together is that both of
them are academic activity management interactive systems and both
of them have social network features.

Mendeley build a support center and list help document there.
Feedback could be send through 'Post a Question' and fill in some
text areas. And for help document, users could make review about it
in helpful or not.

At front page of Mendeley, a 'Feedback' label presented at left part.
We could see submitted Idea in this feedback window and status of
these suggestions. From this toolkit, users may find link of forum
where a place piece the top idea feedback, numbers of votes for a
suggestion, my own suggestion address status etc.   That is the major
different part between Mendeley forum and other cases, it become an

interactive plant for developers and users. Users could post new idea just in the bar of this page, as easily as post a tweet.
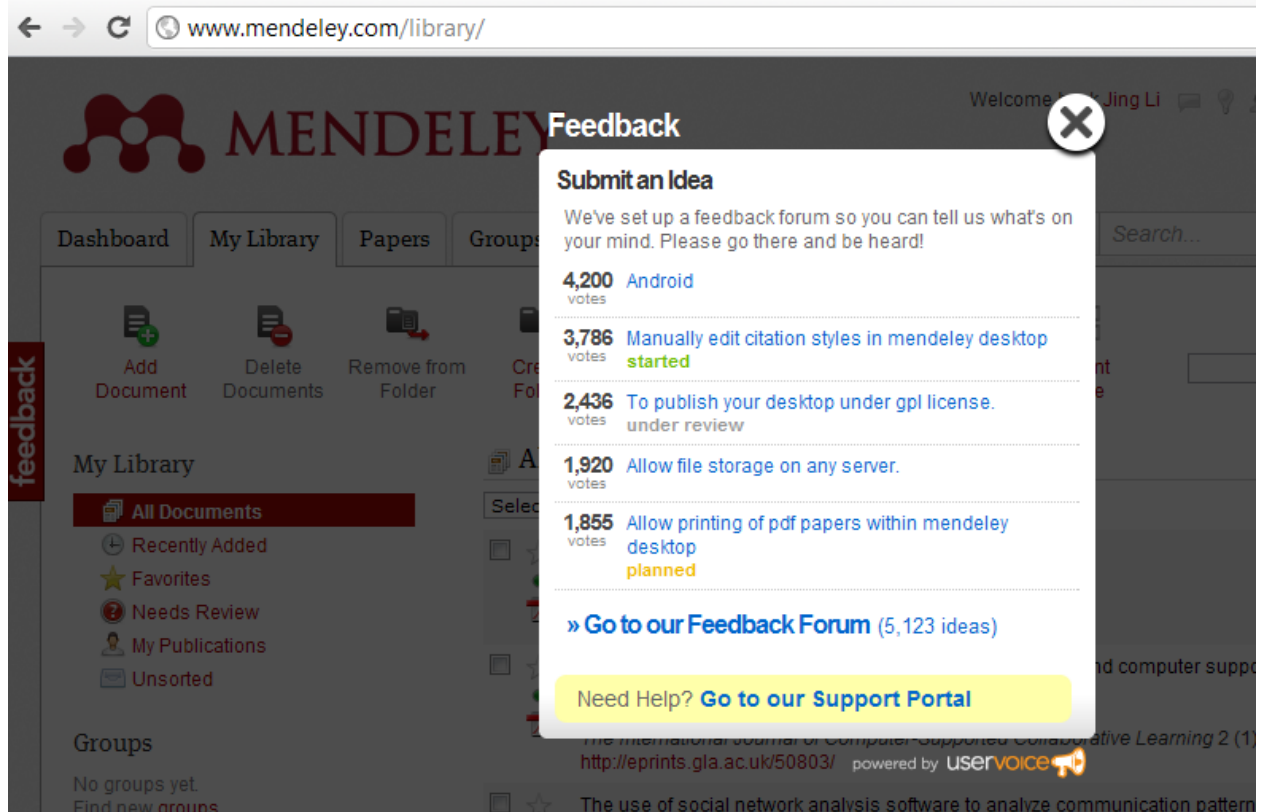

Figure 17. Mendeley feedback window
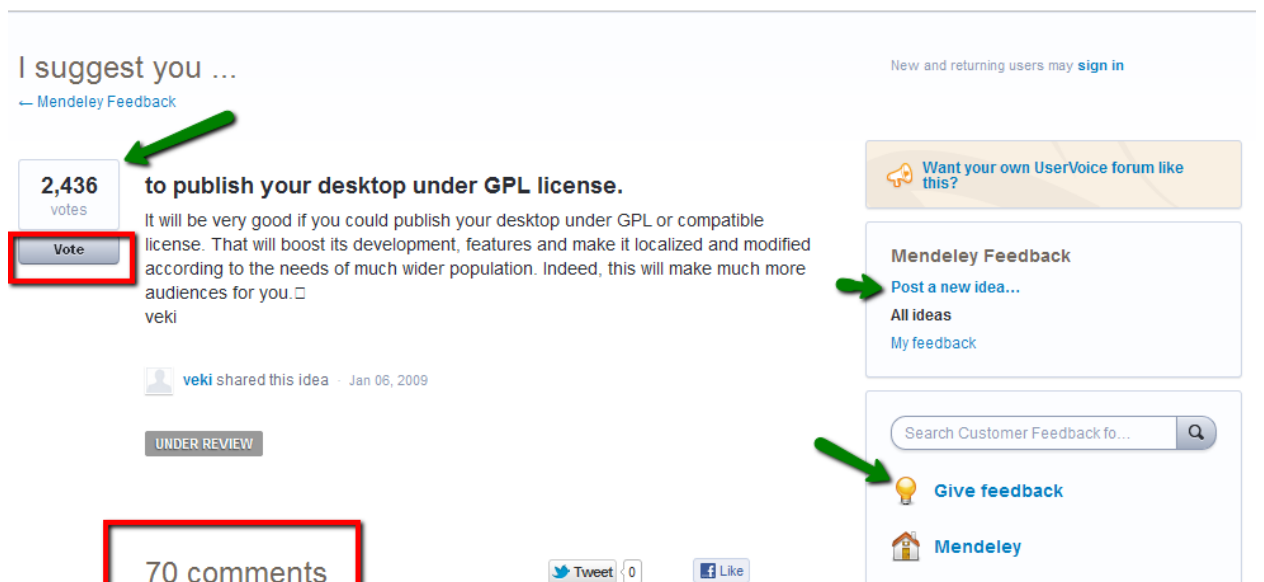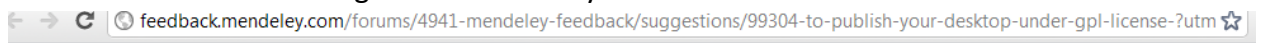
Figure18. Mendeley feedback page

Conference Navigator 3(CN3) is an interactive system which could help user to manage their conference schedule with some addition functions with social network they set up in this system. CN3 is a kind of professional site with academic purpose and the most prominent feature of this site should be time sensitive, each conference could be not the same one and it has time period limitation in practical perspective. Under that circumstance, feedback and bug testing become a challenge issue for developers. CN3 got three ways of feedback collection, it adds a feedback toolkit at front page like Mendeley, it also has help page by FAQ link. An external bug report system called Flyspray was also operated for feedback collection.

Figure19. CN3 feedback window

II. Elements in feedback mechanism

Based on the briefly introduction of these feedback mechanism above, it may not be hard to find same element or method in feedback

mechanism appears in divers social network sites. I would like to make summary of them and find which one may be the most popular practice.

1. **Help Page And Yes/No Button**

   Help page and Yes/No button could be considered as a set of feedback method for social network sites. It could get short and instant feedback about the content of help information.
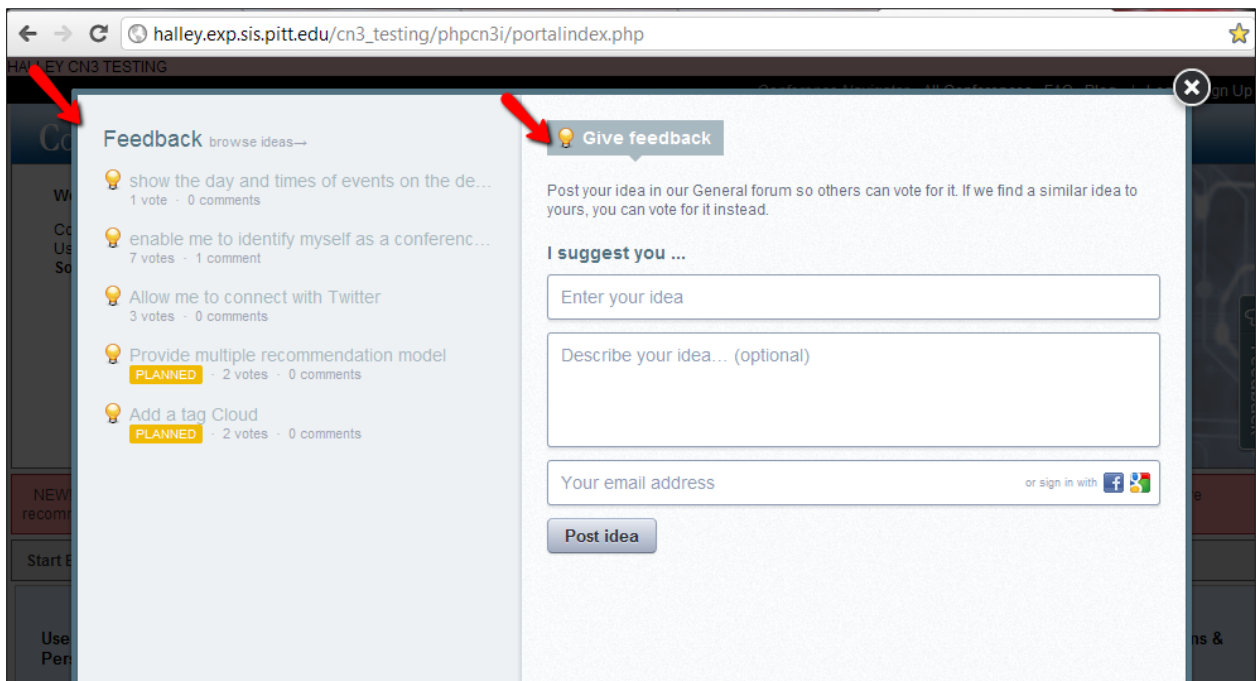
2. **Suggestion Text box**
   Suggestion text box is a mechanism that provides blank text areas for users who would write general suggestions of web sites features. It may not have predefined bug situations and screen shot attach functions.

3. **Forum**
   Forum is a place which could see interactivities between users about topics which related to the features of this social network websites. Sometimes, it plays a role of Q&A system for users of these sites.

4. **Post and votes**
   Posted idea could be published in a specific page of help or support center of these sites. That idea may be new design insight to improve feature of this social network site or problem experienced by a user. This combination could be efficient and that benefits from the votes process save lots of time and energy of checking lot of redundancy information and make important things presented conspicuous.

5. **Developers Feedback**
   How do users know their feedback proceeding? Developer feedback could be a significant way to attract more users to write report or ideas. Developers updated feedback could be posted in vary ways, tweet, and Facebook page and voted posted message. These feedback

often been placed in an interactive interface and users could re-send feedback in following or making comments.

6. **Bug report tools**

   Typical bug report tool could be text area with screen shot uploading button. Users could describe details about what kind of problem they encountered and provide evidence just about that page. Among these websites, I admire that Google feedback tool used in YouTube is the sharpest weapon in this field.

7. **Directly report button**

   This button refers to the feedback button under the description by a predefined situation by the website. If user just experienced this very Issue, he or she could report things happened by using such directly report button

8. **Feedback in mobile application**

   Not all these social network sites got feedback mechanism in their mobile version. Two major ways is to copy the model of web version and reform a more simple post feature in their app or loading to the help page of their websites.

   If we tried to employ that category of elements in feedback mechanism of Social Network sites, we could get result about which elements was the most universal methods for designers of these websites to collect feedbacks. (Table1)

   Help page and bug report tool are the most favorite sort of feedback element used by developers of these websites. Directly report button and Post & Votes seems to be more fresh ways to solve feedback collections but they still could be efficient ways to gathering feedbacks.

	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	LinkedIn	Mendeley	CN3
Help Page with Y/N button	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Suggestion Text Box	✓	✓				✓
Forum	✓		✓		✓	
Post and Votes		✓			✓	
Developers Feedback	✓	✓			✓	✓
Bug report tool	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Feedback in Mobile app	✓	✓		✓		
Direct report button			✓			

Table1. Feedback element used on SNSs

III.   Design advices for feedbacks in CN3

Although CN3 got own bug report tools, Flyspray, it was still an external system which may not be efficient to collect feedback information more accurately and conveniently. In the further, CN3 may be joined in more academic conference schedule and it will attract more registered users with no doubt. I propose several advices which may improve feedback mechanism of Conference Navigators.

1. **Set feedback element in help page**
    Help page in CN3 was existed as FAQ page which listed some
    introduction information about using this system. However, we
    did not know whether it is really helpful for our readers. So if we
    could set review button about the content or explanation of
    functions in help page that may be a supplement of the feedback
    mechanism.
2. **Embed internal bug report tool**
    Feedback tool of YouTube could be a reasonable tool of our
    feedback mechanism. Although we already have Flyspray as
    professional tool to report bugs for CN3, it could not be collected
    information in more efficient way because of lack of topic
    limitation and indirectly relations with this specific systems.
    Maybe it is unnecessary for users to upload reports in the same
    way as other site, we should provide an internal way to collect
    feedbacks for CN3, like provide links in help page, or embedded
    Google feedback tools, and most significant thing is that this
    function should include screen shot uploading.
3. **Feedback History checking**
    While new feedback functions about advices proceeding from
    developer has already be excited, I suggest we could try it in a
    deeper level.

    This mechanism could also be a feedback sidebar with feedback
    history when user signed in the systems. It should include the
    features links heighted where users had found a bug about it, and
    previous bug report summary with the content and status of this
    bug. In that case, users could re-enter these pages where they
    report something's not working and recheck the latest usability by
    themselves.

Pre-request conditions should be that CN3 got stable category of features, users have history track record in system servers (which could be found in database log file of CN3) and precious personal record and consistency bug record ID. This function could be active through the programing in CSS and HTML.

4. **Independent feedback part of system**
   We should combine all these element suggested before in a separate part of CN3 which could be on the same level as other features. Upgrade FAQ into Help center or Support could be more convenient for user to get assistance. In that part we could also provide link of our blog or supporting twitter account.

   To achieve this plan, we need new relations in our DB and more storage space for our feedback record and information. We also need more people to be take charge of these responsibilities and publish our latest proceeding of fixing problems.

IV.   Summary of designing feedback mechanism of Social Network Sites

For developers who want to construct a good feedback mechanism in social network sites, we could learned some general rules or steps from previous cases.

1. **Know who your users are**
   We should understand clearly what is our major object of this site, that is to say, who are the person we serve to? Like professional sites may provide feedback element in more efficient ways with some terms users may familiar with and consider more for their background information. For old people, they should be more comfortable to see feedback tools in more easier used form and with less emerging new words which make things more confusing.

2. **Feedback Mechanism is an interactive system**
    Feedback mechanism design should follow laws in interactive system design. That is the most directly and frequency channel that users could communicate with developers, it is significant to this form of interactive through the interface. So developer need provide sufficient ways of feedback collection and enough patients to improve design detail of these elements. We could imagine when a person need help or meet problems, diverse methods of support, more language as hint, clearly construction and reasonable guide with the feedback tools will make much sense of that occasion.

3. **Expand large scales in whole systems**
    Indicating that providing feedback is possible in any pages of the system could be more a more honest attitude of developers who want to hear voice from users. And it is absolutely more efficient to find bugs from a system by users.

4. **Division of features in systems**
    Some large Social Network Sites as Facebook got large scale of users from different realm of the society. That may affect the features to have larger categories that means some features may just work or be used by specific group of people. For instance, some users are professional and some are novices, they may explore the whole systems in different aspects and levels.
    So that feedback questions or methods should consider capability to evaluate the system of different users.

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[8]LinkedIn: http://www.linkedin.com/

[9]Mendeley: http://www.mendeley.com/

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[11] http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics