**Explaining Why Young Adults Use MySpace and Facebook
Through Uses and Gratifications Theory**

Mark A. Urista
Qingwen Dong
Kenneth D. Day

Mark Urista (M.A. University of the Pacific, 2008) is an Adjunct Instructor at El Camino College and Cal State Fullerton. Qingwen Dong (Ph.D. Washington State University, 1995) is Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication and Kenneth D. Day (Ph.D. Indiana University, 1980) is Professor at the University of the Pacific. Please direct all correspondence to Qingwen Dong @ Department of Communication, University of the Pacific, Stockton, CA 95211, USA; email:qdong@pacific.edu; Phone: (209) 946-3044.

Abstract

        Using a grounded theory approach and a uses and gratifications framework, this exploratory study examined through focus groups why young adults use social network sites (MySpace and Facebook). Young adults have been found to depend heavily on the Internet for entertainment and information. Based on consistent themes emerging out of focus group discussions, it is proposed that individuals use social-networking sites to experience selective, efficient, and immediate connection with others for their (mediated) interpersonal communication satisfaction and as an ongoing way to seek the approval and support of other people. This theory is expected to help communication researchers and educators develop a better understanding of the powerful influence social networking sites (SNS) have on users. Limitations and suggestions for future research are provided.

Introduction

MySpace and Facebook are two leading online social networking sites (SNS) that are popular with young adults. Individuals can develop their own home page to include their favorite music, television shows, and photos. These SNS have attracted millions of members who socialize with other people on the Internet including and sometimes supplanting traditional socialization agents (family, school, peer groups and environment). MySpace and Facebook enable individuals to play an active role in the socialization process and in constructing their own identity. Dye (2007) pointed out that this new medium has created a new generation of individuals whose identities are defined by their connections and the content they produce online.

SNS provide members with an easy and convenient medium for communicating with family, friends, and others. Additionally, individual users' needs and wants can be fulfilled constantly and instantaneously. In the past, people have used a combination of face-to-face human interaction as well as mass media such as television, radio, and movies to fulfill these needs and wants. Often, these gratifications were delayed due to factors including inaccessibility, unresponsiveness, programming and scheduling. In contrast, SNS are different from these other forms of mass media due to the fact that they empower individuals to play an active role in sending messages to others in their social network. Moreover, this active role is revolutionary insofar that it changes the traditional model of mass media effects. In the new model, individuals can be instantly gratified by their use of SNS through both mediated social contact and through selective and on-demand access to other media content provided as part of SNS services.

Over the course of the past five years, MySpace and Facebook have become the two most popular SNS on the web today. Despite the large number of studies that have recently examined SNS, there continues to be a gap in our understanding of why people use these two SNS. The primary research question of this study is: how do members of these SNS use the sites to fulfill their wants and needs? Answers to this research question are expected to help us better understand why young adults have been reported to be so addicted to these SNS.

Literature Review

Background

Haythornthwaite (2005) believes that the uniqueness of SNS is not in their ability to allow individual to meet strangers but rather their ability to enable users to shape and make their social networks visible to others. Many SNS members do not necessarily develop a network to meet new people but rather to communicate with people who are already a part of their existing social networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

MySpace was originally created by current CEO Tom Anderson's Internet company eUniverse. As the CEO and largest shareholder of eUniverse, Anderson recognized that online communities were the future of the Internet and made the decision to use the technology, resources, and capital of eUniverse to launch Myspace.com in August 2003. The first users of Myspace were eUniverse employees who participated in contests to see who could recruit the most friends to the site. The growth of Myspace was generated mostly by word of mouth as members began inviting more friends and acquaintances to join the site (FreeMyspace). Indie-rock bands from the Los Angeles region were some of the earliest users of MySpace. "These bands began creating profiles and local promoters used MySpace to advertise VIP passes for popular clubs" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 7). By 2004, teenagers started joining MySpace *en masse.* As these teens signed up, they encouraged their friends to join. This word-of-mouth

phenomena ultimately made MySpace what it is today, the third most popular website in the United States and recipient of roughly 80 % of all SNS visits (Alexa.com).

Facebook began in early 2004 as a Harvard-only SNS (Cassidy, 2006). To join a user had to have a harvard.edu email address. This exclusivity was one of the primary features that attracted college students to the site. "As Facebook began supporting other schools, those users were also required to have email addresses associated with those institutions, a requirement that kept the site relatively closed and contributed to users' perceptions of the site as an intimate, private community (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 8)." In 2005 Facebook opened access to high school students and in 2006 opened the site to the general public and introduced communities for commercial organizations (Smith, 2006). By 2007, Facebook was reported to have more than 21 million registered members generating 1.6 billion page views a day (Needham & Company, 2007). In 2006, Facebook was used at over 2,000 United States colleges and was the seventh most popular site on the World Wide Web with respect to total page views (Cassidy, 2006).

Several functions of SNS make them particularly attractive to users. These include walls, blogs, bulletins, profiles, and photo albums. Walls are comment sections on a user's profile that can be written on by friends within the user's network. People who visit a member's profile can view the comments that his or her friends write on his or her wall. Cross (2002) defined a blog as "a site with dated entries that its editors visit regularly." Many members of SNS use their blog to project their thoughts and feelings. Cross also noted that blogs can be used to communicate with a wide array of groups including the public, friends, and family. Bulletins are messages posted by users that are visible by all the members in the user's network. Profiles are web pages that display a user's picture and contains information that depicts a user's interests and biographical data. Photo albums are a place where users can upload pictures on their profile.

Uses and Gratifications

Uses and gratifications can be viewed as a psychological communication perspective which focuses on how individual use mass media and other forms of communication such as interpersonal communication to fulfill their needs and wants (Rubin, 2002). This psychological perspective constituted a shift from the traditional mechanistic approach which suggests that individual media consumers are passive.

According to the uses and gratification perspective, media use is determined by a group of key elements including "people's needs and motives to communicate, the psychological and social environment, the mass media, functional alternatives to media use, communication behavior, and the consequences of such behavior" (Rubin, 1994, p. 419). Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) defined that the uses and gratification perspective as focusing on "the social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectation of the mass media or other sources, which lead to different patterns of media exposure resulting in need gratifications and other consequences" (as cited in Rubin, 1994, p. 419).

Previous uses and gratification research by Kayahara and Wellman (2007) has grouped media gratifications into two categories: process and content. Process gratifications arise from the performance of the activity, such as unstructured Web browsing or creating content on one's profile whereas content gratifications occurs from acquiring information (Kayahara & Wellman, 2007). Furthermore, Baran and Davis (1995) conceptualized that "the person follows his or her interests, choosing media content according to his or her needs and synthesizes that content to satisfy those needs" (p. 219). In short, the selection and usage of media is a goal-directed, purposive, and motivated action (Rosengren, 1974).

Uses and gratifications research has typically focused on how media are used to satisfy cognitive and affective needs involving personal needs and entertainment needs (Rubin, 2002). These include the need for personal identity, escape, and self-presentation. Stafford and Gonier (2004) have identified several gratifications from Internet use that motivate users' behaviors. These include web searching, the acquisition of information, the ability to engage in interpersonal communication, and socialization. It is important to note that some of these gratifications are mediated versions of face-to-face human communication. As the number of members of SNS increases, so does the popularity of using the sites for satisfying cognitive and affective needs. Research has shown that college students spend at least 100 minutes per day online (Anderson, 2001) and "the Internet serves interpersonal utility functions (such as relationship building, social maintenance, and social recognition) as much as entertainment and information utility functions" (Leung, 2007, p, 205). Starkman (2007) has demonstrated that motivations for using the Internet are primarily caused by desires for "relaxation, fun, encouragement, and status" (p. 211). Other studies regarding online image building and relationship maintenance point to similar "motivations for Internet usage [such as] interpersonal relations, information, and entertainment" (Ho Cho, 2007, p. 341).

The Wollfradt and Doll Internet Motivation Scale comprises three underlying motives for using the Internet: information, interpersonal communication, and entertainment (Matsuba, 2006, p. 278). According to Matsuba (2006), certain people are more likely to use the Internet for mood management (such as entertainment and information seeking) and social compensation (such as gaining recognition and relationship maintenance) (p. 278). They may also use the Internet to "connect and maintain social relationships" (Stevens & Morris, 2007). A 1995 study of college students' Internet usage resulted in "six motivational categories: entertainment, social interaction, passing the time, escape, information, and Web site preference" (Kaye, 1998, p. 34).

As previously noted, many individuals are motivated to use the Internet by their desire to socialize with other people. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) proposed that the Internet can satisfy interpersonal communication gratifications through functions like email and chat rooms. Song, LaRose, Eastin, and Lin (2004) pointed to the satisfaction that people receive as members of virtual communities due to the fact they can generate their own content and use it to satisfy their desires. Dominick (1999) determined that individuals use their home pages as links to others who share their interests and to foster supportive relationships with others. Even the observation of other people's behavior can yield gratification for viewers (Eastin, 2002). In short, an individual will be motivated to use the Internet if he or she believes it will help serve his or her objectives to socialize with other people.

Ray (2007) explored the multifunctional uses of SNS for simultaneously fulfilling entertainment, information, surveillance, diversion and social utility needs. In her study, Ray demonstrated that SNS satisfy a variety of needs in one central location, thus making it a popular destination for many Internet users. This, in turn, increases the interpersonal connectivity and organizational involvement of people who are members of these sites (Wellman et. al., 2001). It also increases the social capital available to individuals as they increase their network of acquaintances through bonding and bridging (Ellison et. al., 2007). Donath and Boyd (2004) hypothesized that social networking sites have the ability to greatly increase weak ties within a community because the technology is conducive to maintaining such ties cheaply and easily.
Summary & Research Questions

The uses and gratification perspective proposes that individuals use media to fulfill their various needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974). The underlying principle of the perspective is that people

will choose media according to their expectations and their drive to attain a gratifying experience. The perspective assumes that people are active consumers of media (Katz et al., 1974) and they make choices about where to go and to what to pay attention. This assumption of an active audience seems particularly well suited to studying a medium designed for active use and known for its interactivity (Morris & Ogan, 1996; Stafford & Stafford, 1998). Through the use of SNS like MySpace and Facebook, members are now able to satisfy their various needs in one central location within the context of a large network composed of a diverse body of individuals. Based on the review of literature, this study proposed the following research question: To what extent do young adults use social networking sites (MySpace and Facebook) to fulfill their needs and wants?

This study seeks to understand the factors that motivate individuals to use SNS to fulfill their needs and wants. SNS have become a central component of many users' lives for the simple reason that members desire to engage in forms of interaction online. This question seeks to reveal the motivations behind these desires and also the tactics employed by members to fulfill their needs and wants.

Method

In order to investigate why individuals use SNS, the focus group method was selected due to its advantages in exploratory studies. This qualitative approach provides insights into the thoughts, ideas, perceptions, and attitudes of individual SNS members who use the online source to fulfill their needs and wants. This inductive process fit this investigation well in that focus groups facilitated the collection of rich data for answering the research question. By formulating empirical generalizations, the study developed a theoretical rationale that explains why people are using SNS.

Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) have noted that the focus group method tends to be used for "obtaining general information about a topic of interest" (p. 15). Krueger and Casey (2000) observe that "focus groups work particularly well to determine the perceptions, feelings and thinking of people about issues [and] products" (p. 12). Moreover, focus groups are unique from other methodologies including personal interviews and questionnaires. Krueger and Casey (2000) add that " the focus group presents a more natural environment than that of the individual interview because participants are influencing and influenced by others - just as they are in real life" (p.11). Additionally, Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) state that, "because focus groups produce a very rich body of data expressed in the respondents own words and context…there is a minimum of artificiality of response, unlike survey questionnaires that ask for responses expressed on five point rating scales or other constrained categories" (p.17).

Subjects

A total of 50 undergraduates from a university in Central California participated in one of six focus groups. Students were selected using convenience sampling to participate in these focus groups. As a motivation for participating in the study, extra credit was offered for students who were enrolled in a large general education class at the university. In order to avoid selective bias, the researchers paid great attention to selecting broadly representative focus groups for the investigation in terms of gender, ethnicity, and major. The main criteria for selecting these subjects included: 1) being either members of MySpace or Facebook; and 2) wanting to share their thoughts and experience with using the SNS with other students. Approval from the university human subject review committee was obtained prior to conducting the study.

Procedures

A focus group discussion guide was used in each focus group investigation. Questions on the uses and strategies employed by members of SNS were asked and participants were encouraged to elaborate on statements that were relevant to the research questions. A moderator who was experienced in using this method of data collection directed the sessions. During each focus group session, students were provided drinks and food to create a relaxed and comfortable setting for the moderator to become familiar with each participant. The focus group discussions were tape recorded and transcribed by an assistant to the principal researcher. Subsequently, direct quotes by participants in the focus groups were transcribed from the audio recordings by the principal researcher.

Data Analysis

The principal researcher listened carefully to the audio tapes and read the complete transcripts for key concepts and key ideas related to the research question. Next, main themes were identified. Direct quotes were than extracted for the purpose of elaboration on each theme related to the research question and categorized under the appropriate theme. Finally, based on the key concepts, themes and direct quotes, answers were provided for the research question.

Results

Five themes emerged from an in-depth analysis of all results in order to answer the research question: "To what extent do young adults use social networking sites (MySpace and Facebook) to fulfill their needs and wants?" The themes of why individuals use SNS to fulfill their needs and wants included: 1) efficient communication, 2) convenient communication, 3) curiosity about others, 4) popularity, and 5) relationship formation and reinforcement.

Efficient Communication

The vast majority of participants stated they use SNS because they are an efficient way to communicate with friends. One participant stated, "if you want to spread news quickly about an event or something, you can do it very easily on MySpace." Many users take pleasure in this capacity for dispersing messages to multiple friends at one time. As one participant put it, "with MySpace I can tell the same thing to everyone, which prevents a million questions being asked."

Participants noted that many significant events are either shared or learned via SNS. "I found out my friend was getting married and another friend was in a car accident." One participant shared that she liked the informality SNS offers for sharing these events with others. "I had a friend who announced her engagement via MySpace. She made a video and sent it through MySpace." The use of bulletin postings appears to be a very efficient way for an individual to get a quick response from others when he or she desires attention. One participant stated "people will post that they are bored so they can have someone call or message them." In this respect it appears that members will use SNS to initiate communication with others in order to satisfy their needs and wants. One participant put it, "when people post bulletins they are doing it to get attention and have someone comfort them." SNS allow members to attain others' attention quickly and efficiently with one single bulletin.

Many participants shared that they use SNS to inform their friends about events in their life in a single message. One participant stated:

> "It's not a hassle [like having individual conversations]. If something major is happening in my life I don't want the same question from thirty people [inquiring about] what happened. I don't want to have to talk to all my friends individually."

Participants also shared that the ability to communicate quickly was another attractive feature that motivates them to use SNS. One participant stated,

> "if you want to say something to someone, but don't want to have a conversation, you can quickly comment them on MySpace." Another participant added, "it's much easier to comment them on MySpace or Facebook [compared to having] a conversation."

Convenient Communication

Two key factors emerged in the focus groups addressing the convenience SNS offer to users: staying in touch with friends and family, and managing communication. All participants noted the capacity to stay in touch with friends was one of the most attractive features for using SNS. The vast majority acknowledged that the primary reason they opened their MySpace or Facebook account was because they were encouraged by friends and/or family to do so. The ability to stay connected with friends and family in distant locations was especially appealing. One participant stated, "it is an easy way of keeping in touch with people and is good for long-distance relationships." Another added that "I use MySpace because I don't want to pay the long-distance charges to talk to people back home."

Many participants acknowledged that they enjoy the convenience SNS offer for managing communication. One participant stated, "[SNS] are convenient because people can log on in their spare time." Another noted, "it's easier to talk to people. You have a chance to think about what you're going to say and how it will be received by the other person." Still another added, "you don't have to deal with [the other person] right away or respond right away." It appears that SNS empower individuals to communicate with others at a rate and manner that he or she desires. Comparing this to other forms of communication where individuals must respond immediately and extemporaneously, one participant said that "you don't need to have an answer right away on MySpace whereas with a phone conversation you do." Some participants acknowledged that they enjoy being on the receiving end of communication without having to engage in turn in any dialogue. One participant stated:

> "I personally use [SNS] because [compared to] other methods of communication it allows me to check up on people without actually asking them questions and allows me to understand what going on in their lives without speaking with them. Sometimes I'm busy and don't have the time to talk with them or find out what's going on in their lives."

Overall, participants agreed they enjoy the convenience and accessibility SNS offer users for communicating with others.

Curiosity about others

The majority of participants in each focus group acknowledged that they use SNS to acquire information about people in whom they are interested. This includes romantic interests, old friends, new roommates, classmates, and people in their community who they would like to know better. Participants also addressed issues of accessibility to other members' profiles. While very few participants shared that they have used SNS to acquire more info on someone they were romantically or platonically interested in, most admitted that they knew someone else who has. One participant stated, "I opened my MySpace account so I could learn more about a girl I thought was cute." Another participant disclosed that her sister uses SNS to find out information about people she would like to date.

Many participants shared that they use SNS to obtain updates about old acquaintances. One participant stated, "I like the fact that I can see what old high school friends are up to." Another stated blatantly, "I use MySpace to spy on people from high school because I like to find out what everyone is doing." Still another participant noted that she enjoys learning about events that happened to old classmates who were mean and cruel. "I look to see if anything bad has happened to them. Especially if they were mean to me." This demonstrates a desire to use SNS to satisfy one's curiosity about people who have made an impression in their lives.

Some participants shared they read discussions that occur in the comments portion of a member's profile to find out information about what is happening in that member's life. One participant stated:

"My friend has daily comments on her page about her engagement. There are conversations [in these comments] between her and someone else. [By observing these comments] I can know what's going on and have an image of what her life is currently like. It's a source of information."

A majority of participants also acknowledged they use SNS to acquire more information about new people they meet. One participant noted one of the biggest uses of SNS among college students is to find out information about future classmates, hallmates, and roommates. "It's kind of nice to know who your roommate is and who the people you are going to go to school with are like beforehand." A participant in another focus group shared that she ended up changing roommates before school started based on what she found on her future roommate's profile. "I used Facebook to check up on my soon to be roommate. I noticed differences between us [in tastes and lifestyles] and knew right away that we wouldn't get along." These examples show that many members use SNS to gain information on other people who they will be living and interacting with on a regular basis.

Participants also shared that they use SNS to acquire information that will help them judge what a person is like. Many participants noted they examine the profile of a person in whom they are interested to form an opinion about that person. One participant stated, "you can find out a lot of information on [a person's] MySpace profile and it gives you a pretty good idea of who they are in real life." Participants shared specific items they look for on a person's profile to learn more about a person they are interested in. One participant stated, "I look at their 'About Me' section and personality tests they've posted. It tells me their personality and [allows me] to figure out who they are as a person."

The final issue that came up within this topic of convenient communication was accessibility. The majority of participants noted that their profiles are set to private to avoid "stalkers." Many participants echoed the statement of one participant who noted, "my profile is private due to the fear of having stalkers. I like having a page that only my friends can view." Several participants shared that they were forced to terminate their membership because of stalkers. One participant, however, stated that she enjoys having her profile accessible to the public. "I'm not concerned [about stalkers] and really enjoy the openness that SNS provide. I want old friends to be able to locate me and view my profile if they are searching." Ironically, many participants acknowledged that they use SNS to inquire about other members even though they are uncomfortable with idea of having people inquire about them. One participant stated, "we like snooping, but don't like it when participants snoop on us." Other participants added they get frustrated when they want to acquire information about someone and are unable to do so because that person's profile is on private even though the vast majority of participants stated that their profiles were set to private.

Popularity

The vast majority of participants agreed that many individuals use SNS to become more popular. Several tactics emerged in the course of the focus groups on how people use SNS to appear more popular. These include, the number of online friends a member has, comments that are posted by other members about the profiles owner and his or her pictures, and the MySpace "Top 8."

Most participants noted that many members attempt to add as many friends as possible to their profile in order to appear more popular. One participant stated, "there's a benefit to having as many friends as you can on MySpace." Another added, "It's like a popularity contest. During high school and when MySpace first came out, it made you popular to have tons of friends." Many participants stated that for many people with hundreds of friends on SNS, these "friends" in actuality are not as dependable or close as "friends" one has in real life.

Participants agreed that obtaining comments from other members is a potent means of increasing one's popularity on SNS. One participant noted, "people like getting comments to build up images of themselves." Another added, "people will post bulletins asking other members to comment on their picture [in order to appear more popular.]" Participants in each group acknowledged that comments on pictures and wall postings make a person feel more popular. Moreover, a large number of comments tend to make a person appear more popular to others because they are receiving attention. Consequently, some SNS users compete with other members for attention. As one participant put it, "I have friends that compare comments. One friend may get 300 comments, while the other gets 10 comments…and they put up similar pictures from the same event. One of my friends averages 300 comments on every picture so it's kind of a competition as to who can get more comments." In this instance, it appears members will use SNS to construct content that will illicit positive feedback from others.

Participants also shared stories of their experiences with ranking friends in the "Top 8" section of their profile. As one participant described it, "with the 'Top 8,' there's a sense of hierarchy. People think it's ranked according to who they're closest with." Many participants admitted they were very conscious of where they ranked in their friends' lists. One participant stated, "I notice where I am on other people's lists. I notice when people move me up or move me down or when I'm not on someone's top list at all." This has caused a lot of conflict between friends and couples. One participant stated, "with a boyfriend or girlfriend, someone might get mad if they're not number one. Sometimes there's drama between a boyfriend or girlfriend and best friend for who's first on the friend list." One participant stated:

> "That number one spot in the "Top 8" * is very important. I just kind of threw my close friends
> and my girlfriend up there and my girlfriend ended up getting really upset because she wasn't in
> the top spot."

Some participants admitted they terminated their "Top 8" section to avoid conflict and upsetting other people. "I got the code to take the Top 8 off of my page because it was just creating drama. Certain people were getting upset because they weren't number one."   In these situations, it appears the costs outweighed the benefits of using SNS for popularity purposes.

Finally, it is worth noting several participants' insights on an emerging group of teens on MySpace who call themselves "Scene Kids."   These teens primarily use MySpace to become more popular online compared to traditional avenues like joining school clubs in the real world. According to one participant, "[Scene Kids are] a subculture of people who take pictures from overhead that mostly look like Emo people and punkrockers. Some of the people also take half-naked pictures." The same participant further noted, "they probably don't have a lot of friends so they think that when they're online they can be a different person just to seem cooler than they really are. They are just in the Scene Kid Group to get more friends and add as many people as possible." When this subculture of teens was brought up in another focus group, one participant noted that she was familiar with the social group and stated, "they always carry a camera around and boast about how many friends, comments and pictures they have to others."

Relationship Formation and Reinforcement

Many participants noted that SNS are extremely useful for meeting new people and maintaining pre-existing relationships. Additionally, some participants acknowledged that SNS allow you to identify who your true friends are based on the interactions that occur on SNS.

In terms of creating new relationships, one participant stated "I was able to use MySpace to look for people who attended [our university] because I didn't know anyone when I came here. It's a good way to get to know people and meet new people." Another added, "I start relationships by initiating it with MySpace. I'll send them a message along the lines of 'I met

you the other day…'" Many participants agreed that they use SNS to obtain more information about someone they met in real life that they are interested in forming a more meaningful relationship with.

In terms of maintaining pre-existing relationships, many users found SNS to be extremely helpful. One participant stated, "without Myspace or Facebook, I wouldn't be in touch with that many people…it allows you to maintain relationships at your own or their own convenience." As previously mentioned, SNS are very convenient for communicating with friends and acquaintances. Consequently, this provides more opportunities for two people to communicate with one another, which in turn, reinforces the relationship between these two people. Some participants noted they use SNS as a "yearbook" to collect and reflect on memories. One participant stated, "I could never delete my page especially because of the comments people leave me. It's nice to go back and read old comments. Sometimes you remember an event happening but not specific events so you can go back and look at comments to remember something funny that happened."

It is important to note that many participants observed that communicating via SNS can strengthen or weaken relationships based on the responses friends make to postings and comments or the lack thereof. One participant stated:

> "With MySpace and Facebook you can find out who your true friends are based on who messages you or comments you back and who remembers your birthday. If someone doesn't [do these things] than you know they are just an acquaintance and not a true friend."

Another stated, you can use bulletins to see who is paying attention or to gauge a level of friendship. "If people respond, [it lets you know] they are actually paying attention to your life and care about you." Other participants agreed with this point sharing experiences where they have had people fail to contact them after posting announcements that they deemed significant. Many participants stated that it is ludicrous people have to post bulletins in order to maintain and strengthen relationships. As one participant put it, "if someone really cares about you, you wouldn't have to post bulletins obsessively." On this point, another participant added, 'if someone only contacts me through MySpace it makes me feel like I am not that important. I call people who are important." Based on these anecdotes, it appears members can use SNS to assess a fellow members attitude about them as a person and their relationship.

<div align="center">Summary of Results</div>

These results inform us why young adults use SNS to satisfy their needs and wants. Because of the nature of individuals' curiosity and the desire to build and develop relationships, SNS users enjoy convenience, efficiency and popularity of using the powerful medium to convey messages and find answers. These results suggest that an immediacy driven tendency motivates young people to use SNS. At a more abstract level, this suggests members use SNS to satisfy a specific gratification that they seek.

The research question of this study was, "how do young adults use social networking sites (MySpace and Facebook) to fulfill their needs and wants?" Based on these five themes, it is evident that individuals are using SNS to satisfy both personal and interpersonal desires. Within these five themes, participants indicated that they enjoy the freedom and capacity SNS offer users for producing and consuming content in a manner that serves their interests. Wimmer and Dominick (1994) proposed that media selection is initiated by the individual based on his or her expectations for media use which are often produced from the predispositions, social interactions, and environmental factors of the individual. On SNS, an individual is able to produce content that fulfills his or her expectations as a consumer of media. This includes creating an attractive profile for one's admiration or the admiration of others. It also includes

using SNS to foster and maintain relationships with others through the creation of content and discourse that is formulated online.

We propose a uses and gratifications theory that states: members use SNS to experience selective, efficient, and immediate contact with others for their (mediated) interpersonal communication satisfaction and as an ongoing way to seek the approval and support of other people. SNS allow a user to be selective in choosing who will and will not see his or her posts and other site information. The information on a user's site can be customized to a selected network of friends in a very efficient way. In a sense, the user becomes a "broadcaster" to an audience that he or she creates and gives access. Additionally, responses from other members in the form of wall posts and friend requests serve as approval and support from mediated relationships that change on a daily basis. Consequently, many users experience addictive behavior in constantly checking for responses to their presentation of self and/or their concerns expressed on daily blogs.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

Through the use of inductive reasoning, this study has developed a uses and gratifications theory that posits that individuals use SNS to experience a selective, efficient, and immediate connection with others for their (mediated) interpersonal communication satisfaction and as an ongoing way to seek the approval and support of other people. Such uses are only now possible through new technology offered by the Internet. Today's young adults are heavy consumers of digital products and consequently are influenced by computer technology, becoming impatient and more demanding for fast results. These young adults constantly text-message and call others in order to find out current information or to know "what's going on." SNS are a useful and convenient tool for staying connected with the events of a friend's life with ease. Compared to calling a person and having a conversation, members of SNS can visit a member's profile or send them a quick message to find out what they want to know. Moreover, SNS users can update their profile to convey impressions of themselves and occurrences in their lives to a large audience without contacting each member of that audience on an individual basis.

Results also suggest that the openness and transparency of SNS is highly popular among users. Many participants stated that this transparency allows them to gain information on others quickly. Moreover, the vast majority of participants state that they have accessed personal information about another user through SNS without that user's knowledge. Gardner and Eng (2005) state that the majority of college students born after 1982 demand instant access to information. Because SNS are so accessible and open, many young people today use these sites to acquire information on someone they are interested in. One reason for this may be because going to a person's profile is quicker and more efficient than actually talking to the person face-to-face or finding out information about that person from others. Moreover, it appears that the openness and transparency of SNS is highly popular among users because it is a simple means for re-establishing contacts with old acquaintances. Due to the large number of young people who are members of MySpace and Facebook, many members are able to use these SNS to reconnect and socialize with friends and classmates from the past.

Results also suggest that many young people use SNS to make themselves look attractive and to increase their social capital. This study's findings on Scene Kids suggests that many young people today are using SNS to create a virtual identity that resembles an idealized self that will boost one's status and self-esteem in both the online and "real" world. In short, SNS are a convenient and efficient way to tailor one's appearance from the comfort of his or her home.

Accordingly, many members are using SNS to make themselves aesthetically more appealing to others with the intention of gaining admirers and friends.

Finally, this study suggests that there is a noticeable distinction between online friends and "real" world friends.   Many participants cited incidences where statements made by online friends appeared disingenuous and superficial. Consequently, this demonstrates that there should be a deeper examination of what it means to be friend online compared to being a friend in the "real" world.

The results of this exploratory study provide a basis for future qualitative and quantitative studies on SNS. Each theme in the results section of this study provides keen insights on the motivations and behaviors of individuals who use SNS for pleasure and self-presentation. The findings of this study support many conclusions that have been drawn in previously-reviewed literature. Participants in this study felt that SNS are a very effective means for building and maintaining relationships. This supports Donath and Boyd's (2004) hypothesis that SNS have the ability to greatly increase weak ties within a community because the technology is well-suited to maintaining such ties cheaply and easily. Many participants acknowledged that SNS make staying in touch with friends much more convenient, which in turn, increases their motivation for maintaining relationships through communication on SNS. Participants also shared their experiences using SNS to foster new relationships. This supports Dominick's (1999) finding that individuals use the Internet to find other individuals they can develop relationships with and Leung's (2007) claim that "the Internet serves interpersonal utility functions such as relationship building, and social maintenance." Creating content on one's profile is a popular strategy for relationship development. Self-expression is another common theme that came up during the course of the focus groups. The fact that so many participants admitted to creating content on their profiles to fulfill their needs and wants supports Kayahara and Wellman's (2007) finding that people will produce content online to attain gratification.

This study has a number of limitations. The first limitation of this study involves the lack of time available to fully examine the topic of SNS using the model of uses and gratifications. Because of time constraints, only five focus groups were conducted. While focus groups produced a wealth of information, the small number of participants in each focus group does not provide a large enough group to be a relevant sample of the population. The population of participants is also problematic insofar that each participant is a student at a four-year university. Consequently, the data collected comes from the viewpoints of college students. This makes it problematic to generalize findings to the entire population of SNS members who have diverse backgrounds and levels of education.

Lack of an outside moderator is another limitation of this study. While the researcher took great care in organizing and facilitating each focus group, the possibility of asking biased questions still existed. The researcher also acted as the principal coder of this study. If another coder had been available, the reliability of the study would be higher due to the assistance and confirmation another coder would offer.

Several findings in this study have not been examined in the current body of literature and warrant future research. First, new studies should examine the authenticity and intimacy of relationships on SNS compared to those in the real world. Second, researchers should also examine the emerging subculture of Scene Kids and gather data on how SNS influence a member's behavior both online and offline. Next, members' attitudes towards privacy and accessibility on SNS should be researched. Finally, future studies should examine the influence that online and offline peers have on self-presentation through SNS.

Reference

Alexa.com's website ranking system and Top 500 global websites. Retrieved September 22, 2007 from http://www.alexa.com/site/ds/top_sites?cc=US&ts_mode=country&lang=none

Anderson, K. (2001, July). Internet use among college students: An exploratory study. *Journal of American College Health*, *50*(1), 21. Retrieved October 13, 2007, from Academic Search Premier Database.

Baran, S. & Davis, D. (1995). *Mass Communication Theory*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Blumler J. G. & E. Katz (1974): *The Uses of Mass Communication*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Boyd, D., & Ellison, N. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13*(1), article 11. http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html

Cassidy, J. (2006, May 15). Me media: How hanging out on the Internet became big business. *The New Yorker, 82* (13), 50.

Cross, A. (2002). Society's efforts this year will have long-lasting effects. *Quill, 90(*4).

Dominick, J. (1999). Who do you think you are? Personal home pages and self-   presentation on the World Wide Web. *Journalism and Mass Communication   Quarterly, 76*(4), 646-658.

Donath, J. & Boyd, D. (2004). Public displays of connection. *BT Technology Journal,   22*(4), 71.

Dye, J. (2007, May). Meet Generation C: Creatively connecting through content. *EContent.* Retrieved September. 20. 2007, from EBSCO Host Database.

Eastin, M. (2002). *From Internet use to the unique Internet user: Assesing information, entertainment and social cognitive models of Internet use.* Paper presented to the National Communication Association, New Orleans, LA.

Ellison, N., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook "friends": Exploring the relationship between college students' use of online social networks   and   social capital. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 12* (3), article   1.   Retrieved October 30, 2007 from   http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue4/ellison.html

FreeMyspace.   (2007).   *Myspace   history.*   Retrieved September 23, 2007, from http://freemyspace.com/?q=node/13

Haythornthwaite, C. (2005). Social networks and Internet connectivity effects.   *Information, Communication, & Society, 8* (2), 125-147.

Ho Cho, S. (2006). Effects of motivations and gender on adolescents' self-disclosure in   Online Chatting. *Cyber Psychology & Behavior*, 10 (3), 339-455

Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). Uses and gratifications research.   *Public Opinion Quarerly, 37* (4), 509-524.

Kaye, B. K. (1998). Uses and gratifications of the World Wide Web: From couch potato to Web potato. *The New Jersey Journal of Communication, 6*(1), 21-40.

Kayahara, J., and Wellman, B. (2007). Searching for culture—high and low. *Journal of Computer-Mediated   Communication*,   *12*(3),   article   4. http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue3/kayahara.html

Kreuger, R. & Casey M. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research.   3rd ed.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Leung, L. (2007). Stressful life events, motives for Internet use, and social support   Among Digital Kids. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *10*(2), 204-211. Retrieved   October   13, 2007, from EBSCO Host Database.

Matsuba, K. (2006). Searching for self and relationships online. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *9*(3), 275-284.

Morris, M., & Ogan, C. (1996). The Internet as mass medium. *Journal of Communication, 46* (1), 39-50.

Papacharissi, Z., & Rubin, A. (2000). Predictors of Internet usage. *Journal of   Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 44,* 175-196.

Rosengren, K. (1974). Uses and gratifications: A paradigm outlined. In J. G. Blumler &   E. Katz (Eds.), *The uses of mass communications: Current   perspectives on   gratifications research* (pp. 269-286). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Rubin, A. (1994). Media uses and effects: A uses-and-gratifications perspective. In J.   Bryant & D. ZiIImann (Eds.), Media effects:Advances in theory and research (pp.   417-436). Hillsdale, N J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Rubin, A. (2002). The uses-and-gratifications perspective of media effects. In J.   Bryant &   D. Zillmann (Eds.), Media effects: Advances in theory and research (2nd   ed., pp. 525-548). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Stafford, T., & Gonier, D. (2004). What Americans like about being online. *Communications of the ACM, 47(11)*, 107-112.

Wellman, B. (2001). Physical place and cyber–place: The rise of networked Individualism." *International Journal for Urban and Regional Research*, *25,* 227–252.

The increased use of the Internet as a new tool in communication has changed the way people interact. This fact is even more evident in the recent development and use of friend-networking sites. Therefore, the present study was conducted to evaluate: (a) why people use these friend-networking sites, (b) what the characteristics are of the typical college user, and (c) what uses and gratifications are met by using these sites. Results indicated that the vast majority of college students are using these friend-networking sites for a significant portion of their day for reasons such as making new friends and locating old friends. Finally, results showed that many uses and gratifications are met by users (e.g., "keeping in touch with friends"). Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) is an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. UGT is an audience-centered approach to understanding mass communication. Diverging from other media effect theories that question "what does media do to people?", UGT focuses on "what do people do with media?" It postulates that media is a highly available product and the audiences are the consumers of the same product. Uses and Gratifications Theory One of the more successful theoretical frameworks from Early theories of mass communication (e.g., the hypodermic which to examine questions of "how" and "why" individuals needle theory) viewed the mass media as having a uniform and use media to satisfy particular needs has been the uses and immediate influence on individuals, whom they perceived as gratifications (U&G). theory. Facebook provides or surpasses the expected gratifications initially users can also form and join virtual groups, develop applica- sought, this leads to recurrent use of the medium and ultimately tions, host content, and learn about each others' interests, to predictable consumption habits.