Seriously Social: Making Connections in the Information Age

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Abstract

This thesis is about digital social networks and associated media in the lives of young, primarily middle class, people. It based on a qualitative study - using interviews, focus groups and participant observation - of university undergraduates in the United Kingdom and Australia. The study traces how, between 2005 and 2008, these students utilise what I term, 'social media' to manage their social lives. My analysis of the data draws attention to the participatory nature of the technology, and characterises how such resources have become 'everyday' and are seen as essential hubs of information. In utilising theoretical perspectives deriving principally from Mead (1934) and Goffman (1963), I argue that the users of social media always seek to reproduce a sense of self and associated relationships that are bound to their real and established connections with others. In this context, the defining principles of social situations rest on what I describe as 'profile presence' and 'presence techniques', where social actions that primarily occur in 'online' settings across the web, are seen as genuine acts and have real consequences. This differs from previous work on mediated interactions and identity that have focused on 'cyberspace' and 'fantasy'. I argue that social action relates to the synthesis of identity and constructive elements of the self across social media, as these are always anchored in networks and authentic associations with others. I conclude by suggesting that there is a *seriously social* sensibility that forms the basis for these relationships and is centred on concern to be always connected and aware of social action across social media.

Keywords:

Digital, everyday, Facebook, ICT, internet, media, presence, social networks, SNS, technology, web

For my father, Michael Hardey

'If you make sure you're connected,

The writing's on the wall.'

(Stereo MCs, *Connected,* 1992)

Table of Contents

List of Figures and Illustrations

Acknowledgements

Authors Declaration

I hereby certify that this thesis is entirely my own work. Two articles that have been published during the course of the research and include related material are:

Hardey, M. (2007) 'Going Live: Converging Mobile Technology and the Sociability of the iGeneration', *M/C Journal*, March, vol. 10, no.1, [online] [retrieved October 2008] http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0703/09-hardey.php

Hardey, M. (forthcoming 2008) 'The formation of rules for digital interaction', *Journal of Information Communication & Society (ICS)*.

Signed:

M. Hardey

Dated: October 2008

- Introduction -

Making the Connection

This thesis is about the digital social networks and associated media in the lives of young, primarily, middle class[1] people. It is a qualitative study, using interviews, focus groups and participant observation, of students in England and Australia and their use of, what I will term, 'social media' between 2005 and 2008. Initially the study set out to explore the role of digital technologies in the transition from home-based social and familial networks to new university-based networks. However, the study coincided with emergence of various new – and what are sometimes termed - Web 2.0 technologies. Prime amongst these are social networking sites (SNSs), which were taken up with great gusto by the young people participating in the study. As such, the research has changed approach to a real-time ethnography of the mainstreaming of Web 2.0 technologies into the everyday lives of university undergraduate students, who have grown up in the Information Age, as they seek to manage the transition of their lives away from 'home'. To illustrate how these new technologies, and the ones that preceded them, become embedded in the early transition to adult life amongst the middle classes, I begin in a perhaps unconventional manner by presenting three brief vignettes. These are designed to encapsulate the transition from home to university in the lives of students over the last three decades, and the role that communication technologies have played.

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[1] *Whilst I recognise that 'middle class' is not a fixed category, I use this term to refer the lifestyles, habits and consumption patterns of relatively young consumers who have grown up in the Information Age and will follow careers based on a university education.*

Figure 1.i 1980s technology image[2]
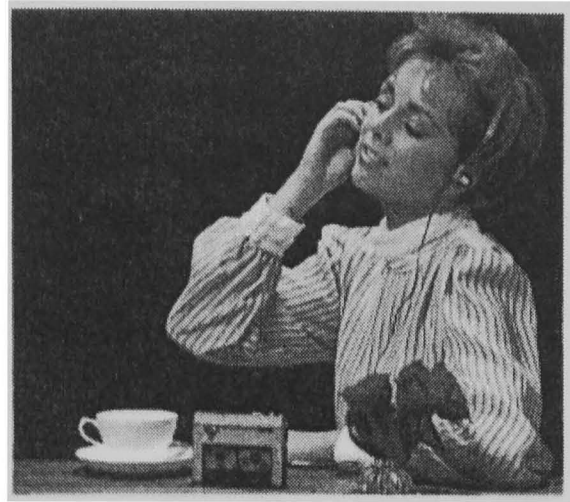
1987 Lisa

Lisa's father was a doctor and had wanted her to 'follow in his footsteps' but she was more interested in art at school. Fortunately her younger brother liked science and was all set to send off his UCCA forms for medical school next year. Her mother took care of the house and acted as an unpaid secretary for her GP husband. Lisa had scraped into the local Grammar school and despite some parental pressure to take a psychology degree she had just started her literature course at a 'red brick' university in the North some hours away from the family home in the South. Although she got a grant, her parents had to 'contribute' which made her feel a little uncomfortable.

University was an attempt to break from home and the friends she had at school who were scattered across various universities and polytechnics. The flat she shared on the campus with other students mostly doing humanities had a pay phone in the lobby, which was always busy on Sunday with 'duty' calls to parents. They had a TV in the kitchen/living area where people gathered to see the television soap *Neighbours* in the late afternoon. Lisa had Kylie's single on a tape that her brother had made up for her.

Social life centred around the Student Union (SU) and especially the large campus bar. Lisa's flat had a large pin board that flatmates used to leave messages on such as 'see you in the bar at seven'. It was also used sometimes to leave phone messages but Paul who had the room nearest to the phone tended to 'take it off the hook' if he was sleeping or working as he claimed the ring was distracting. This made it difficult to use and sometimes Lisa would go across the campus to see if one of the public phones was working to make calls that she did not want to be too open to others. It had also annoyed Lisa's mother who had tried to call her to see if she was 'alright' after the hurricane had caused havoc in the South in October. 'You are so out of touch dear', was a constant theme from her parents when she went home and would result in Lisa's promises 'to write'.

However, for Lisa escaping the parental gaze was not necessarily a problem. In term time she lost touch with her school friends although catching up in the holidays was fun. A couple of her 'best friends' kept up a sporadic exchange of letters but this was not helped by the uncertainties of the campus mail system that deposited letters in a mass of pigeonholes that were turned over by anyone passing by.

Clubs were important to Lisa's social life and the regular meetings usually ended up in a sociable visit to the campus bar. Being some distance from the city Lisa, like other first years living on the campus, rarely strayed into 'town'. Term time life had settled down into a routine as her 'group' would commonly meet in the Students Union several nights a week usually around 8pm. Lisa liked the sense that she knew there would be friends there without having to take time to try and call people and put up with the vagaries of other students leaving notes if they happened not to answer the phone. The library was also a social place as books and even journals figured heavily on the reading list. Irritatingly, some lecturers did not include the class mark of books, which meant time spent either running through index cards or the tricky to use 'electronic catalogue'. Lisa and one

other flatmate had a computer in their room and unlike most others on her course she printed out her essays. Some students used the student computer rooms but these were hard to get space in and, anyway, tended to be full of 'techie boys' playing something called *Dungeons and Dragons* or trapped in MUDs (Multi-User Dungeon, Domain or Dimension).

At university Lisa had an on/off boyfriend in Computer Science who tried to introduce *Dungeons and Dragons* to her as well as something called 'email' which he thought would 'take over the world'. She kept meaning to take a picture of him to share with her friends back home as he looked a little like a scruffy Harrison Ford, but she never remembered to bring her camera from home. Plus he and his mates were spending far too much time with their Nintendo video game when not involved in drinking games in the bar. Or was it Sega?

It was in the SU bar where Lisa and her boyfriend had met and where they would continue to meet up and be introduced to each other's friends. He was in a shared house in town with no phone or phone box close by. This meant that communication was unreliable so dates were arranged in advance, but Lisa liked not being at his beck and call and enjoyed listening to her new Sony Walkman when she went into town to meet him.

Figure 1.ii 1990s technology image[3]

1997 Jennifer

Jennifer's first day was taken up with formal meetings, incidental introductions and trying to come to terms with the functionality of her new mobile phone that had been foisted onto her by her parents. Now the first of her 'at home' friends to have a mobile she had spent most of that initial morning somewhat laboriously putting everyone's number into her handset. She now had the ability to call anyone she wanted at any time; a rather marvellous scenario if any of her friends were in and available to be talked to, but conversations had been limited by their parents' command of the household landline, as well as the cost (a lot) of mobile calling, to add to that, the signal and battery life of the 'thing' were less than reliable and functionality was at a rather impractical 'poor show' level.

When Jennifer opened the door to her new flat and equally new and unknown flatmates she had felt daunted at the prospect of living with 11 other strangers. Meeting the other students on her courses she felt equally daunted, but relieved that someone she had identified as being 'like herself' was holding, with some determination, their (what had to be new) mobile phone. Immediately she had felt a connection (although not a voice to voice

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[3] *Image retrieved from: http://www.inmagine.com/*

over the mobile one) and it seemed that the other girl also acknowledged this; smiling and calling out 'oh so your olds got you one too!' It turned out that Eve had a similar 'parenty' and over-protective background. This was rooted in the 'usual' parent 'what if's', from a 'fear of the unknown', that was directed more toward Jennifer and Eve, rather than from their own concerns. This had resulted in the over-protective measures that came in the form of the, at times, quite welcome and desirable 'dad' taxi services, and the most recent of 'good' parenting accompaniments, the mobile phone.

It was with joy that evening that, when sat by herself in her new university room, Jennifer received her first text; 'hi this is Eve I'm in the car drink?' Jennifer's response 'in the car?' was immediately replied by 'sorry meant "bar" still getting used to texting!' Smiling, Jennifer reached for her keys and purse and left in pursuit of new friends and liquid refreshment. Her new mobile (much to the annoyance of her mother's anxious calls that evening) was left in her room, communicating (or rather not) with itself.

Fresher's Week ran like a blur, and in very quick succession the first term came to an end. What had remained as a 'thing' in her room, an undiscovered and unused piece of technology, was now firmly wedged into both Jennifer's and Eve's daily communicative routines. 'Keys, money, phone!' was the mantra that Jennifer uttered under her breath as she left her accommodation before going anywhere, lest she miss that important call! Where once she had been happy to leave 'that thing' burning its own battery power, waiting for a call that was not from family and consisting of very stunted conversations about 'are you eating alright' (her mother) and 'you alright for money?' (Her father), Jennifer now would not be without it.

The numbers from new friends had filled her phone book, and many of them had been for mobiles too, so no more ringing of landlines and the humiliating protocols with friends' parents in order to speak to that chosen someone. Plus texting was beginning to become an addiction. Everyone

6

was texting in their droves and during lectures, silly things, smiley faces etc. Plus this method of communicating was so much cheaper than calling and seemed to go under the radar of the lecturers too! Also Jennifer's new boyfriend was a 'bit useless', as he had been described, at talking on the phone, so the texts between them were a nice way to maintain an informal and relaxed contact.

Besides her mobile phone, Jennifer's friends from home had discovered IM (Instant Messenger) and email and Jennifer and her peers were taking full advantage of the universities' free and 24-hour access to the computer labs. More often full to bursting with overseas students and 'nerds', Jennifer found herself surrounded by her friends and flat-mates all keen to access their Hotmail and IM accounts. 'IM has changed my life!' declared her flatmate Ben one day.

Eve's own observation on the last night of term (hastily arranged via text) that 'It was a good job my parents haven't bought me my own computer, or I would never be offline' captured perfectly the 'sad' and 'nerdy' life that could come from computer ownership. Jennifer acknowledged that she would be on IM all the time if that were the case, 'when I visit home I am logged in always! Thank goodness for dad's work computer, although it does keep throwing me off the Internet every 30 minutes'.

At home for Christmas, Jennifer found that her reliance on her mobile was a source of amusement to her family. Her mother claimed that her daughter had morphed into an extension of 'that aerial' and was left speculating whether it was so 'healthy' to be so connected. The phone it seemed was never invited for dinner, nor allowed to interrupt 'family time'. Jennifer found that she got round most of this through text, a skill and communication action that her parents seemed not to understand. If Jennifer's mobile was not physically ringing and attached to the side of her head it seemed, at least for the time being, that she could get away with a

little textual communication. Even under the dinner table, a new (and more than useful, nay essential) skill that had just been acquired. She was getting quite good at the 'drunkard' text too, to her boyfriend when inevitably one or other would send 'x' for 'goodnight' before falling asleep beside the phone. Constantly attached to their communications.

Figure 1.iii 2000s technology image[4]
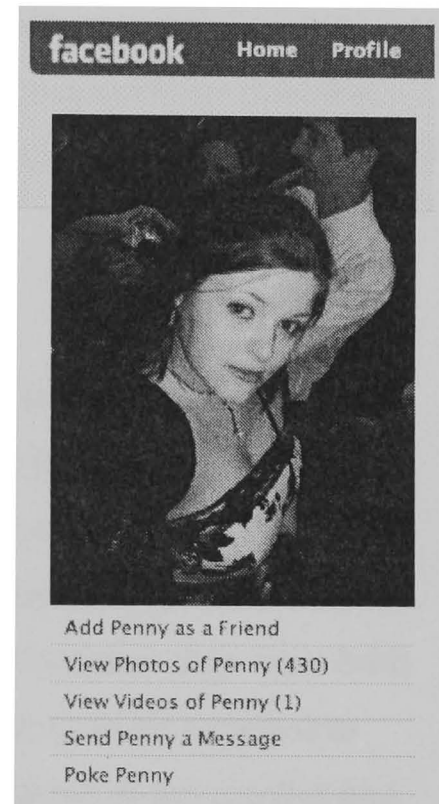
2007 Penny

'Penny is: 'in the car on my way home, willing my mother to have made pancakes for brunch''

This was the first of what would be many updates via Twitter and Penny's Facebook account, depending on which was responding most quickly to her mobile phone. Something she had not counted on when she first started using Facebook was how damned addictive and totally compulsive these social media were! Being away from her laptop, or mobile for more than a moment, usually bought Penny out in a cold sweat, and if she was not the

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[4] *Image reproduced from public listing on Facebook*
http://www.facebook.com/home.php?src=fftb#/s.php?init=q&q=penny&ref

8

one sweating then you can be sure that as soon as she re-connected herself in her various digital forms there would be hell to pay as others had sweated in her absence.

'Where the hell have you been?' Michael had accusingly posted on her wall on Facebook when she had gone 'AWOL' for an afternoon in the pub. Apparently, 'Penny is: 'In the pub'' as a status update was not justification enough for having ignored Michael's, and the rest of her social world's, demands upon her for one afternoon. Ironic when you consider that she was out with another group of friends being *very* 'social' and not at all AWOL.

The dial tone calling home dragged on for ages. In fact this was the second time that Penny had attempted to get in touch with her parents. As usual mum was failing to answer her mobile and texts, and dad just had his switched to 'off' more often than being 'on'. Such disconnection from her parents could mean a number of things; in the first instance they were both out having a marvellous time somewhere and too busy to be attached to such 'trite' and 'unimportant' devices of communication as her mother had described them. Or more likely, in her mother's case, her mobile was at the bottom of a very weighty and rather fabulous handbag so that its chances of escape and to be heard were next to none, and that her father had (once again) left his mobile to run down to no charge, testing both Penny's and Nokia's patience in terms of reliable communication mechanisms.

As exciting as her parents' lives were, scenario number two was bound to be the case. There was absolutely no point in messaging their Facebook accounts either as the pair failed to login regularly enough to make this a worthwhile point of contact. Still it was nice to see that mum had reacquainted herself with some previously 'lost' friends and that her father was now a member of the *'We Love Kylie's Bottom Club'*, sometimes there

9

really was too much information. Nothing that went without the notice of feeds on Facebook.

Penny's apprehensions about getting in touch with her parents were outweighed by the excitement she felt returning from her interview and introduction to York University. So it seemed that the groups that she had joined on Facebook were not misplaced in their assessment of York as 'small, with ducks and that's why we love it!' And the campus pictures that she had downloaded off Flickr did show it to be true to it's 1960s concretised and mostly 'glorious' form. This, together with the 'space age' main hall, had stuck in Penny's mind as she left the campus, her fingers frantically texting on her mobile. Still the Department was more than nice, and it was a relief to finally meet up with Amanda whom she had found via one of the York University groups on Facebook, and was going to be doing the same course as herself in September. They both shared a retro passion for *TakeThat* too, something they had both posted on their Facebook Profiles and bonded over.

By the time Penny had driven the 1.5 hours journey time home, she was feeling more than restless to 'just' check her Facebook account, to see how her other friends had got on over the weekend with their various visits to universities and time away from the home village. Fortunate enough to have access to the Internet via her mobile, which many of her friends were not, the journey back was one of the few occasions that she could recollect being out of touch, and disconnected for so long a period. Her best friend Racquel was bearing up less well falling foul of the relentless urge to send a constant stream of texts in order to placate her time away from her laptop and Facebook. 'Whaaaaaaaazzzzzzuppppppp?' had been her latest text. Clearly the girl was in need of some retail, and Facebook, therapy, Penny perceived, as she mentally noted to 'SuperPoke' Amanda via Facebook when she got home.

On her return both parents were cruising through the papers, pancakes were indeed on the menu and yes both mobiles had been switched to 'off' or 'lost' modes as neither parent was particularly concerned about being 'out of the loop' for more than hours at a time. Thankfully the broadband was on, so Penny was able to glean in quick succession from her Facebook NewsFeed:

Figure 1.iv image of Facebook NewsFeed[5]
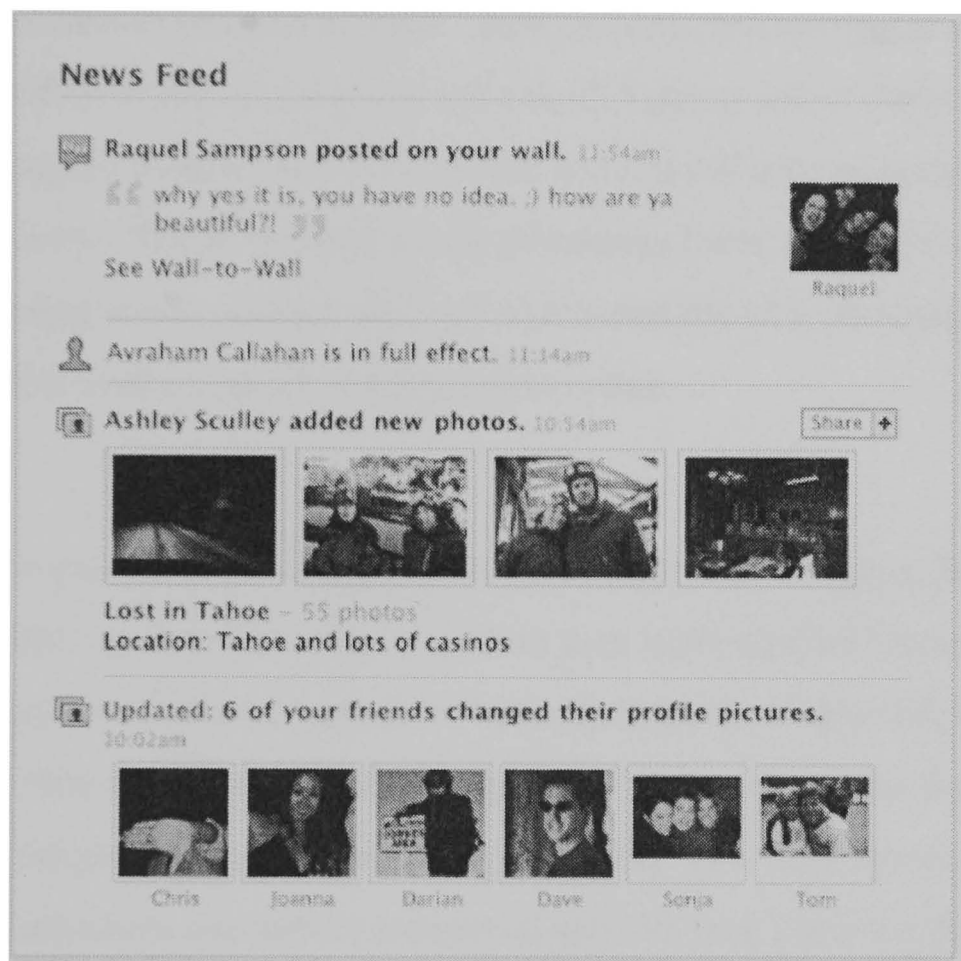
Good, then I haven't missed too much, Penny reasoned, as she tucked into stacked pancakes and hot coffee.

A common theme to the lives of Lisa, Jennifer and Penny is that they are centred on connections with others and the accumulation of new social networks at university that are managed by various technologies. As the

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[5] *Image reproduced from Electronic Privacy Centre retrieved from, http://epic.org/privacy/facebook/newsfeed_example.png*

range of devices and media resources have increased in the past three decades, such social 'connectedness' is also about the dilemmas of being disconnected. As a university student Penny's concerns are centred on the constant awareness of friends who, like Samantha, are equally attentive to the same social actions and technologies. In contrast to Penny's short sketch, to be able to write this introduction I have sought to isolate myself from the connectivity that is a characteristic of these students' lives. I have had to deliberately disconnect, and distance myself from my own social networks and attention to friend's actions. This includes the setting of an automatic 'out of office' reply message for my email, logging out of Facebook and switching my mobile phone to 'silent', in order to ensure no interruptions or distractions. These kinds of social processes form an important dimension to everyday social actions, and are characteristic of a *'seriously social'* sensibility in the lives of young people today.

On one level this research confirms how social technologies have long shaped human relationships, which in turn have also influenced the development of other resources. Indeed, since the beginning of the twentieth century this has been characterised by a concern about the deterioration of social relationships and a 'loss of community' as a consequence of rapid industrialisation and urban industrial growth (e.g. Tönnies, [1887] (1957); Durkheim, [1893] (1933)). The invention of the first electric communication technologies, such as the telegraph (Standage, 1999), and the telephone (Fischer, 1992) allowed for new forms of mediated contact, which could take place at a distance and in synchronous real time. More recently the development of the internet[6] as a communication medium has been celebrated by some influential commentators as a new 'communications

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[6] *Woolgar (2002) in his book Virtual Society?, gives a, 'special significance' to the use of 'internet' with a lowercase spelling in order to emphasise 'our increasing familiarity' (2002: 12) with the technology. This familiarity is reinforced and acknowledged in this study with the spelling in the same style. The use of the word 'web' (from now on) to indicate the World Wide Web will also be treated in the same way.*

revolution' (e.g. Rheingold, 1993). In the 1990s it was suggested that the use of the World Wide Web on the internet promoted new relationships that recaptured a sense of previously 'lost' communities (e.g. Wellman, 1999; Putnam, 2000). For others, however, such technology was regarded as further evidence of a 'social fragmentation' (e.g. Stoll, 1995).

Today the internet is navigated as part of a 'web 2.0', which is distinct from the 1990s 'web 1.0' 'cyberspace' (Turkle, 1995). Some of the most popular sites are Social Networking Sites (SNSs), which link together known networks of friends. Whilst all SNSs are unique in terms of 'look' and content, they have been broadly defined as a 'web-based service' that allows individuals to,

> '(1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system' (boyd[7] and Ellison, 2007).

Since 2005 with the launch of the American based SNS, Facebook, in April there has been a rapid rise in popularity and the daily use of such resources amongst university students. Today the site is 'open' to anyone with a valid email account, however when the site was first launched, membership was restricted to Harvard university students in the United States, and then opened up to other international universities in Europe and Asia Pacific. This study analyses the growing influence of Facebook amongst students at two universities, based in the United Kingdom and Australia. A full explanation of Facebook's development is outlined in Chapter Three.

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[7] *The researcher 'danah boyd' has legally changed the spelling of her name. It is written without capitalisation for 'aesthetic appreciation'. Please refer to boyd's own explanation about her decision, http://www.danah.org/name.html*

This research is at the forefront of what Wellman (2004) and others have suggested is an emerging, 'socially networked-connected' culture (e.g. Wellman et al, 2008, Hogan, 2007a; 2007b). The choice of the title 'Seriously Social' is to signify the speed and scale of the diffusion of SNSs since 2005, as they have merged to become a part of everyday sociability for students like Penny. Alongside these developments, the new possibilities for social connections that have emerged have created new demands about how to manage networks and maintain friendships. At the same time as Penny I was also one of the initial users of Facebook and, like other students, faced similar dilemmas about how to set up and use SNSs. In June 2007 I set up a blog called 'Practising a Proper Social Demeanour: A Guide To Facebook Etiquette'. My intention was to write about the possibilities of new social rules as they took hold in the lives of my friends and myself, and as this research developed. The blog is included as material for this study and runs parallel to the analysis drawing on the discussions of friends and other readers and commentators to the blog.[8] From the blog I have included my first posting[9] as an appropriate way to frame the research (see overleaf),

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[8] *The inclusion of the blog is central to this research, where it is a consequence of the technology that the individual has to participate and 'feel' what it is like to use the same media. These ideas are discussed in more detail in the Chapter Four methodology.*

[9] *http://properfacebooketiquette.blogspot.com/2007/06/introduction-to-guide-for-facebook.html*

Practising a Proper Social Demeanour: A Guide To Facebook Etiquette

New rules for surviving the digitally connected world.

Tuesday, 12th June, 2007

Welcome to what I foresee as the Guide to Proper Facebook Etiquette.

Like you, I'm already used to my 'offline' social rituals and reciprocated ceremonies of communication. Moving these 'online' was led by the chatrooms, and 'cyber' encounters of the 1990s. But recently I have started to use the Social Networking Site (SNS), Facebook. This feels at once an unfamiliar social territory, and yet contains elements that I recognise from my everyday social interactions. This guide is intended to provide space for the reflection of the concerns, dilemmas and encounters when using Facebook as they occur in my life and yours. This includes how we display ourselves to friends and express a passing wave of a 'hello' across SNSs.

So a new etiquette?, away from the image of afternoon tea, doilies, grand balls, hoisted pinkies and stilted conversation, and as a new set of social protocols that can be matched to our new social settings.

By using Facebook I (like you) share a constant connection to friends, which must be managed in the right way to maintain the relationship, or we risk losing our social face across a whole network of connections. Here questions arise such as: 'When does one reply to a Facebook message?'

'What kind of social information should one include, or not include on a Profile Page?' 'What is a Facebook poke, and how should one respond if you receive one?' 'What is the best way to manage an unflattering tagged picture?' And so on and so forth.

As the first users of Facebook, we are finding out for ourselves the appropriate types of social behaviour and social etiquette to bring our friends together. As a natural progression from the slow technology we used in the 1990s to stay in touch, now is not the time to email, but to actually *see* and take part in what our friends are up to as it happens in the moment. At this stage Facebook represents how we are being bought closer together and drawn into our social networks, and yet at the same time this comes with its own social pitfalls, where we seek to re-establish our social boundaries, and niceties, across such new spaces. Today, we are the new users of Facebook and 'pioneers' of a *social* media. As part of a young generation who have grown up with technology in the past we have been characterised as 'shallow', 'apathetic' and with a short attention span... Part of an 'MTV generation'.

Instead, this guide is to show how interactions evolve as part of highly engaged, sophisticated and personalised networks of links.

Does this mean that the social courtesy held in such high acclaim has been replaced, or simply abandoned?

With a little help from You and my Facebook friends it is time to find out...

Please note that You, the reader of this blog are encouraged to comment and send questions. I shall endeavour to include these and respond in future posts.

Penny could be a reader of my blog, where we share concerns about how to manage our friendship connections across Facebook. For the students that are included in this study, Facebook is now seen as an essential way to maintain and facilitate relationships. Interactions and relations are seen to move relatively seamlessly across previous online and offline 'domains'. It should also be noted that since 2005 there has been an increase in the use of other web-based resources that I classify in Chapter Three as various forms of 'social media', which promote a participatory sociability based on the visibility of known social networks. This work is distinct from the image of the materially alone 'nerd' or 'geeky' user whose interactions are dominated by the computer screen. This image typified the email driven communication of the 1990s, where students like Jennifer had to rely on the access to university computer labs for a reliable web connection, or send texts via a mobile phone to arrange their social activities. An important dimension to the research is that it is of-the-moment and has evolved at the same time and at the same pace as technologies through which interactions have been observed and participated. There is a possible limitation here with the range and scope of the study, where writing today (October, 2008) the data is already going 'out of date' and by the time of publication may constitute a 'social history'. However, the data represents a significant turning point in the progress of communication. In addition there are also clear implications for the ways in which social research can and should be carried out in the future (e.g. Olsson, 2000; Mika, 2005; McCarty et al, 2007; Robinson, 2007). Thus, the focus of the research is on the openings and introductions with the others, where shared encounters uncover a new set of social protocols that are essential for everyday sociability.

1.1 Thesis structure

The thesis is composed of eight chapters, including this Introduction.

Chapter Two: Young People's Socialisation of ICT Media from the 1980s to the 2000s

I begin this chapter with the age-based construct of generations to explain the main social characteristics of the young people included in the research. This group are framed within other identified generations, such as the 'Baby Boomers', 'Generation X' and 'Generation Y'. The main body of the chapter is largely descriptive to give an overview of the role of ICT media in the socialisation of these young people as they were growing up during the 1980s and 1990s.

Chapter Three: Social Media in the Age of Web 2.0

This chapter is composed of two parts. Part I provides an overview of the 'second era' of the internet which has been identified as a 'Web 2.0'. This examines the context of Web 2.0 as the main domain for SNSs and provides a description of the main web-based resources to which the students in this study have access. In the next section, the focus is on the role of the user as a 'participant' and 'contributor' to web-based resources. This is framed by my definition of 'social media', which is characterised by the perceived 'openness' of the technology, and the control and ownership of data. I also provide a brief background to the three main SNSs that are characterised by their use by young people, and pay particular attention to the extension and accumulation of social information on the web. Before the second part of the chapter is an, 'informal' 'Guide to Facebook' to understand the affordances that have shaped how this site has been used and developed during the course of the research. Part II of this chapter engages with the necessary background literature of cyberspace which is framed by the conceptualisation of identity. With particular reference to both the work of

Goffman (1963) and Mead (1934) the 'stable' but 'emergent' identities that I describe in the analysis are framed by the crossing from online and offline dualities to a more sophisticated *social* sensibility.

Chapter Four: The Methodological Approach

This chapter provides an opportunity to pause and reflect on the three-year period of the research, and to explore how the data fits within established research practices. This includes 103 semi-structured interviews and a total of 12 focus groups with 57 participants that were conducted at two data collection sites at the universities of Melbourne and York. The main discussion is framed by my role as an ethnographer within a new SNS setting. Here I note how the emergence of social media resources has also been accompanied by a shift in the methodological approaches and systematic recording of data by social scientists. I argue that the research dynamic allowed for me to be an integral part of the networks of the students that I was observing. Here the openness and visibility of my role as an ethnographer was intended to accentuate the different modes of interaction and sociability in our lives, where I could be everything from a 'participant', to another student 'friend', or just an 'observer' in the field. I suggest that there are new challenges in the wake of such new technologies that have shifted the context of the research setting and role of the researcher.

Chapter Five: The Start of Social Relations on Facebook

This is the first of three analysis chapters. The discussion begins by detailing the structure of Facebook when the students first joined in 2005. From the data I identify four emergent stages. The first *encouragement*, relates to the students links to their friends as an important 'pull' to join Facebook. The second *collaboration* describes the continual awareness of the student's friends where they had to first organise their networks. The third *reciprocation*, explores in more detail the types of social interaction that

takes place during the initial 'friending' process. The final stage is *reinforcement* where individuals look for confirmation, or rejection of a shared relationship on Facebook. These four stages are shown to coalesce to encourage friends to share the same social space and corresponding encounters.

Chapter Six: A Facebook Profile Presence

In this chapter I develop the notion of a 'profile presence', which is based on the display of personal information from a Profile Page on a SNS. The profile presence draws on Mead's (1934) work on the self and is underpinned by three interlocking elements. The first element draws on the construct of the self that must always be *anchored in the real*. The emphasis is on the continuity and extension of the processes of identity as recognised traits of the individual. The analysis focuses on how these are reproduced as part of a reflexive engagement with known others. The second element is about *the display of a brand image*. Here the symbolic reproduction of self-image is cast as a 'branded' identity and shares much with what Lury (2004) has framed as 'performing production'. The final element is described as *inherently social*. I explain how Facebook and other social media help fix in place a representation of the self to display to friends. Before moving to chapter seven, I suggest how there are a new set of social obligations that is ordered by the constant awareness of others.

Chapter Seven: Presence Techniques

In this chapter I extend the analysis away from focus on just Facebook and frame the encounters that take place across social media as 'presence techniques'. I show how the students are not confined to any one application or web site in their management of friendship connections and have been carried across a range of other resources that include Twitter, Flickr and YouTube. A new element to the data is how such resources have also

infiltrated into the lives of other friends and family who are not students. In the discussion I outline three main dimensions to such presence techniques. The first is directed by the *natural extension of everyday relations*, which are led initially by the personalisation and display of connections to known university friends as described in Chapter Five. The second is described as a *social vigilance* that refers to the increased awareness of friend's activities and connectedness to personal networks. This leads onto the third presence technique, a *compulsive obligation*, where the emphasis is on how the students feel a constant pressure to act on the social information from others. This is summed up by a sense of a need to be always connected to Facebook and aware of social media.

Conclusion: A Seriously Social Sensibility

This chapter builds on the ethnographic data to show how social media resources and accompanying interactions go beyond the initially university-based networks of students on Facebook. Prominence is given to the continuation of the connections and accumulation of networks of friends across various social media resources. Through observation of the distinctive qualities of social media, engagement with the most innovative users, and a shared enthusiasm about the potential of such resources, I lead the discussion with the formation of a *seriously social sensibility*.

- Chapter Two -
Young People's Socialisation of ICT Media from the 1980s
to the 2000s

Introduction

This chapter is largely descriptive in order to give an overview of the
material and social background of the young, middle class people included in
this study as they were growing up in the 1980s and 1990s and reached
young adulthood in the 2000s. This three decade period sees the emergence
of an increasingly participatory and consumer-led mass-marketisation of
technology (for an overview see timeline figure 2.i, page 51) as these
resources become affordable commodities both within the home, as bought
by parents, and for personal consumption, purchased by the young people
themselves (Curran and Gurevitch, 1996; Humphreys, 1996; Alexander et al,
2004). Throughout this chapter I refer to 'ICT media' to indicate the range of
technological devices and resources to which these young people had access,
and which were developed, during this period. It is through the description
of the young people's home, school and private lives that I suggest that the
use and popularity of such technologies is closely linked to an established
sensibility and cultural way of life. This work draws from earlier studies of
children, youth and technology, such as Holloway and Valentine's (2003)
work on the children who were born into the 'information age', where ICT
media forms an important part of how 'today's children' construct and
develop identities and form relationships. Indeed as Bijker and Law suggest,
'Technologies and technological practices are built in a process of social
construction and negotiation' (1992: 13). Thus, rather than a technologically
determined social history, the story that follows should be treated as, 'part of
a long history of rich and often wayward social practices' through which the
middle class children of the 1980s and 1990s have 'become socially
acquainted with these technologies' (Thrift, 1996: 1472).

2.1 Young people as the first generation of ICT media users

The availability of ICT media has been associated with a 'privileged elite' and typically from middle-class households that had the financial means to be able to draw on a particular set of cultural resources to bring new technology into the home and to ensure access to the same resources at school (Becker, 2000; Holloway and Valentine, 2003; Livingstone, 1999; McAdoo, 2000). This relates to the broader debate about the nature of the 'cyberspace' or digital divide (Loader, 1998a; 1998b) Alongside a class alignment, the age demographic of this group has been used to characterise these young people as technology users, arranged by what Flacks (1971) refers to as the 'generational effects' of specific age cohorts. At the time of writing, the young people mentioned in this study are members of the most recent generational classification, which is characterised as a 'Generation Y' (e.g. Neuborne and Kerwin, 1999). Recent academic studies that include, Bakwell and Mitchell (2003), Rugimbana (2007), Ramsey et al (2007) and Dann (2007), refer to a Generation Y in the identification of a new 'everyday' style of mass-market and individualistic consumerism. This type and level of consumerism has also been noted by other writers, like Carroll et al (2002), who link young people to a youth culture that is centred on the availability and popularity of mobile telecommunications technology. Another example is the *The Mobile Youth Report* (2008) which highlighted how the use of mobile media technologies is framed by the cultural status of the devices in the eyes of young consumers (Dhaliwal, 2008). For Facer, et al the notion of a 'Generation Y' provides a frame for the way they explore young people's role as part of what they describe as the 'Information Revolution' of the late 1990s and the corresponding surrounding 'hype' about the 'myth of the cyberkid' (2001: 451). In terms of a clearly categorised age-band the various notions of a Generation Y provide, at best, only a very general consensus in terms of the definition and scope of the term. From the examples mentioned above this category is commonly used to refer to a specific group of young people, born from the late 1970s through to the mid 1980s and to

characterise their social and cultural background. It is important to note that with the inclusion of further research and social reports, that this classification is emergent. Therefore, it should be treated with caution as a category more used in marketing and the media rather than a classification based on careful academic research and grounded in appropriate empirical data. To reinforce this point, we can observe that there is considerable overlap between Generation Y and the newest that is gaining popularity and identified as a 'Generation Z'. This has been used to denote those aged, typically, one year to thirteen years and who were born in the mid 1990s (e.g. Sladek and Harnett, 2006; Riedling 2007). Significantly, as Jorgensen (2003: 41) reminds us, the greater part of the generational data and literature cited by writers is 'subjective, non-representative, makes use of single-point-of-time data and uses retrospective comparisons'. Further examples of such crude representations can be seen in the emergence of such popular generation tagging as 'N-gen', 'Wired Generation', 'Echo Boomers', 'Google Generation', 'the iPods' and, one of the most recent and pertinent to this study, the 'Facebook Generation' (Coupland, 2006; Howe and Strauss 2000; Montgomery, 2007; Tapscott, 1998; Turrow and Tsui, 2008). These labels imply certain characteristics about the use of ICT media and characteristics or features of the demographic that they describe. Within this type of generational structuring, commentators have made reference to the potential for a 'generation gap' and considered how 'new generations' may be distinguished from previous generations (e.g. Pilcher, 1994: 481). These popular names place emphasis on the stratification of populations that result from their anticipated technology competence and use. For example, in terms of the type of resources used, e.g. a 'Google Generation', and the expected engagement, knowledge and proficiency of the technology, e.g. as appropriate for a 'Wired Generation'. On this basis, the following table presents a *typification* of the type of access to and ownership of technology as divided across the most widely used and recognised generational categories.

Figure 2.ii Table showing the generational classification of ICT media use

Media Immigrants *Baby Boomers*	Media Embracers *Generation X*	Media Natives *Generation Y*
Reached adulthood without technology. Share little interest in ICT media innovation and have a lack of awareness about how to use technology. Overall this group tend to be unfamiliar with the internet, podcasts, SMS, wireless etc.	Members of Generation X were in their late teens when ICT media technology developed in a commercial and mass-market sense. In this context they are typified as the 'embracers' who are more willing than their parents generation to take up and use new technology. In terms of technology ownership they are likely to own a mobile phone and use the internet for online shopping and email.	Have grown up with constant awareness of technology. For this group, competitive consumer markets and rapid product innovation shaped their childhood. Generally children of this generation are confident with a range of ICT media and often own an array of devices. Generation Y are most likely to use the internet for *everyday* sociability.

The information in the table is intended only as an indication of the likely media utilisation characteristics of each generation. The categories are not designed to be a robust representation of all group members. Indeed, starting with the age-based classification of young people gives too simplistic a stratification of the group included in this study, which focuses on the nuanced and subtle modes of ICT media engagement in everyday life. What is important to note from an academic perspective is that the insertion of 'abrupt' lines between generations is without the acknowledgement of the 'economic, political and social dynamism of modern life' rather than the accounting of a whole generation of people (Jorgensen, 2003: 41). Sufficient attention must be given to the 'internal stratifications' that include cultural influences, as well as the social and intellectual trends of the time (Gennaro and Dutton, 2008). Indeed, it would be wrong to suggest that technology has been embedded in the same way across a whole generation. For this reason, this research is focussed on the group of young people who were born between 1980 and 1990, and are the most confident and engaged with ICT media. Whilst this group represent a particular sub-set of 'Generation Y' and

they share certain characteristics and life-course choices, they are distinguished from their peers by their middle class background and transition to university as undergraduates in 2005. For the rest of the chapter attention is focused on the influence of what I frame as the *socialisation* of ICT media in the lives of these young people. To give a broad overview, the table below shows a summary of the main ICT media for the three-decade period from the 1980s to 2000s when this particular group were growing up.

Figure 2.iii Table showing a decade-based overview of ICT Media 1980-2000

ICT Media	*1980s* *1 to 9 years*	*1990s* *10 years to early teens*	*2000s* *Late teens to 20 years and above*
Computer	Desktop PC	Laptop	Handheld computer/mobile phone
Internet	Modem dial-up	Web 1.0 Cyberspace AOL IM	Web 2.0 Broadband Wireless Open source
Game	Video Arcade PacMan Mostly single player with some 'bat n ball' games with more than one controller	Sega: Mega Drive Sonic the Hedgehog Nintendo: NES Game Boy Donkey Kong Sony PlayStation 1.0 Multiplayer	Sony PlayStation 2.0 Xbox Multiplayer online
Music	Walkman	Portable CD Player Mini Disc	iPod
Phone	Landline Pager 1G	PDA 2G	3G 4G iPhone

The structure of the rest of the chapter falls into two main parts. The first outlines what can be thought as the 'top-down', or formal situating of ICT media that was formed by Government policy, education strategy, and home and parental based influences. The second part concentrates on the 'bottom-up' or more informal set of circumstances that were influenced by the

personal consumer choice of the young people as well as peer-based social and cultural actions. Therefore, we can see how there is transition from the external authority of public institutions and official sources, to the private and personalised preferences of the young people themselves. To begin, I outline the penetration of ICT media in the school that was promoted by Government policies in the 1980s.

2.2 Government policy and computers for schools

Figure 2.iv Image of 'retro' computing technology[10]

Prior to the 1970s, for school students the use of computers was limited where this kind of institutional ownership of computers was 'difficult to imagine' (Tatnall and Davey, 2008: 1). This situation began to change during the 1970s as Government policy sought to promote ICT skills training amongst school-aged children. At this time the computing technology was comparatively slow, expensive and used now redundant media, such as cassette tapes and floppy discs that were often unreliable. The education

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[10] *Image retrieved from virginmedia.com*
http://www.virginmedia.com/microsites/technology/slideshow/

agenda was influenced by Government policy that looked to the potential of computing technology that would enable future generations to participate in what was foreseen as a new *global* economic market led by technological innovation. Within this global market children represented the future workers, hence the investment in core computing skills were seen as 'essential' for a healthy future economy and future expert workforce (Coulby and Ward, 1998). Education policy reinforced the vision of young people both as the future consumers of ICT media and as the forerunners to the acquisition of skills of future 'knowledge industries' (Facer et al, 2001: 92). School children were seen as the technologically productive workers of the future (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1997), and 'central to the fulfilment of the promise of the 'information revolution'' (Facer et al, 2001: 92). This desire to produce a 'computer literate' generation reflected older nineteenth century debates about the need for a basic literacy for the workforce. Underpinning both of these visions was the concern for the need of industry to be able to compete internationally and to be ready for new technologies and more open markets.

For young people in the United Kingdom in the 1980s the opportunity for access to ICT media was led by the Conservative Party Government policy, which set out to introduce a national education technology agenda intended for *all* schools (Plomp et al, 2007). One policy example was the 'National Development Programme for Computer-Assisted Learning' that was launched in 1973 and designed to put computers into most schools by the 1980s (Olssen, 2004). Alongside this policy agenda the Local Education Authorities (LEA) were encouraged to install the British computer based company, Acorn, BBC Micro system to support the home technology industry in the wake of competition from other computer companies from Japan and the United States. The intention was to facilitate the 'Microcomputers in Education revolution', which 'changed the education landscape in the early to mid 1980s' (Tatnall and Davey, 2008: 1). Similar enticements were

implemented in other industrialised nations, such as the United States, where the computer company Apple was active in pushing for legislation to create tax incentives for the donation of Apple computers into American high-schools (OTA report, 1982). Another part of the Conservative Government ICT education policy was to actively fund schools so that they could build 'computer classrooms'. This also formed part of the 'one computer in every school' strategy in the early 1980s (Trowler, 1998). Following these incentives, under the Labour Government in the 1990s this was supplanted by new projects including the formal establishment of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) (Hulme and Hulme 2000). The computing trends forecast projected the innovation of ICT media with a greater storage capacity, increased memory, smaller desk-top devices and easier access, as well as being more financially viable for a national schools agenda (Coulby and Ward, 1998).   However, despite the universality of these changes, it was not uncommon for school pupils to be offered different opportunities in different areas, as the local authority influenced the direction and delivery of national policy into local schools (Holloway and Valentine, 2003; Reynolds et al, 2003; Selwyn and Bullon, 2000).   In addition, while the new 'microcomputers' of the mid 1980s were cheaper and easier to work with than the late 1970s minis and mainframes, they still appeared as 'quite foreign' to many school teaching staff (Tatnall and Davey, 2008: 1).   At this time, the training of teachers and ICT skills development for staff within schools had to compete with different agendas and resources that also affected the standard in the level of teaching that was available to school children (Holloway and Valentine, 2003).   By the 1990s incentives such as the 'Excellence in Cities initiative', launched in Britain in March 1999 were designed to provide subsidised loans for teachers for the purchase of computers. The intention was to address the lack of ICT experience amongst teaching staff. Other schemes such as the introduction of a low cost home computer which was leased to pupils who had been classified as 'disadvantaged' was only 'broadly welcomed' by head teachers as they were

responsible for managing the extra resources and implementing such provisions (Trowler, 1998).

What is significant is that the school-based ICT media of the 1980s and 1990s was one of the first instances when young people had access to and were able to acquire knowledge about computing technology. However, the appearance of computers in the school classroom does not necessarily mean that pupils gain equal access and consequent experience. For example, within educational research the privileging of male pupils over female pupils in the use of school technology is a well developed theme (e.g. Bryson and De Castell 1998; Volman and Van Eck, 2001). Recent initiatives such as after-school computer clubs for girls (CC4G) point to the continued gender disadvantage[11]. To give a broad indication of the investmentment and penetration of computing, the graph below shows the average number of school-age pupils, from both primary and secondary schools, numbered per computer in England from the mid 1990s to 2006.

Figure 2.v Graph showing the average number of pupils per computer (estimates) in maintained school England[12]

Chart A: Average number of pupils per computer in maintained schools (estimates). England - time series
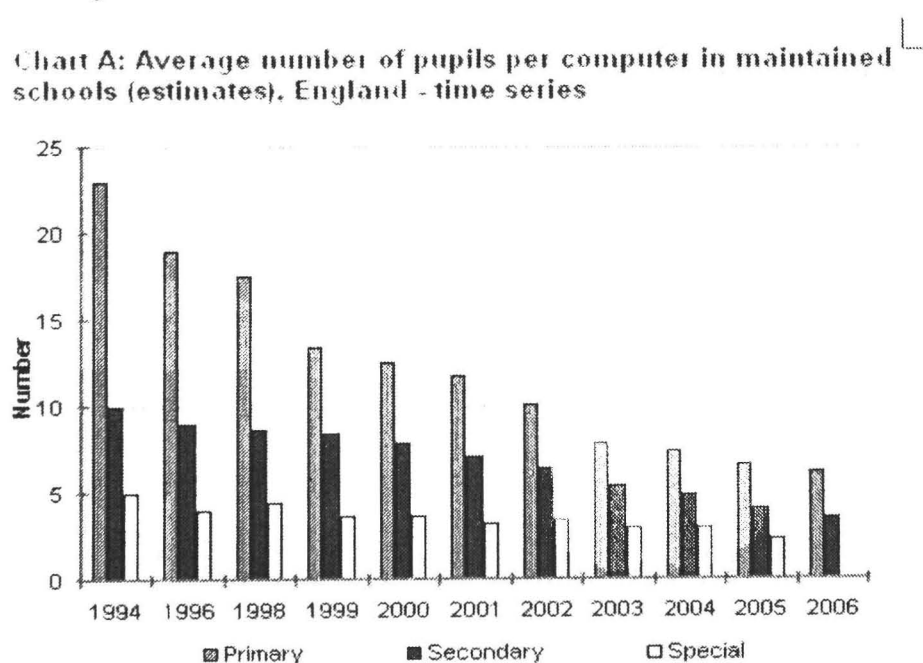
[11] http://www.e-skills.com/e-skills-UK-in-schools/2195
[12] Graph reproduced from the 'Trends in Education and Skills' by the Department for Children Schools and Family.

Before the introduction of a national school ICT agenda, it was difficult for most state schools to provide students with hands-on access to a computer. Indeed, the National Curriculum offered little opportunity for ICT-based subjects during the 1980s (Mitchell, 1980; Sutton, 1991) and this continues to be a 'problem area' in education for the provision of information literacy as part of a more global agenda for school children today (e.g. Kong, 2008). Overall this period saw a rapid increase in the computerisation of resources, with school work assignments and a growing commitment to ICT media that had become an important issue not only for Government policy and the education agenda, but also for pupils' home lives, as school work had accompanying homework that was also expected to be computer based.

2.3 Playing with computers at home

Part of the increased confidence in and knowledge about ICT media is a result of play and interaction with peers who also shared a familiarity with the same technology (Provenzo, 1991; Prensky, 2003). In effect the home computer was both a 'toy' and a work-based 'tool' in the home, where school homework encouraged computer use in the home for families that could afford a desktop machine (Downes, 1996; Harris, 1999). The incorporation into the home of IT marked the beginning of a consumer led mass-market media industry. For example, the home desktop PCs marketed by Apple and IBM opened up competition for other computing devices such as game consoles. Within middle class households, the technology began to be seen as an, 'affordable' commodity and importantly was considered as an 'essential' part of the 'modern home' (Lally, 2002). Computing technology was also marketed in ways that depicted the PC as necessary for children's education. Along with devices like Sony's Walkman, home game consoles became one of the most 'conspicuous consumer products of the 1980s' (Murdock, Hartmann and Gray, 1992: 146).

Figure 2.vi Images of the Nintendo NES and Game Boy[13]
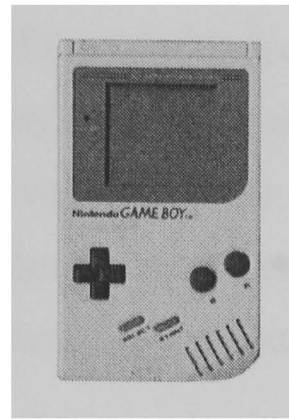
Launched 1983   Launched 1989

In the 1980s Nintendo and Sega were the most visible competitors in a new market and the first to sell mass-market computer games consoles. The 'best selling' games console of its time, the Nintendo NES (see images above) has sold over 60 million units worldwide since its launch in 1985,[14]. Moving forwards into the 1990s, platform games were made popular by characters such as Super Mario Bros, Donkey Kong and Sonic the Hedgehog (refer to figure 2.i timeline, page 51). Heralded as the 'most successful' video game mascots of their time, these characters continue to hold iconic status (Herman et al, 2001). For devices like the Nintendo Game Boy this meant that game media were smaller, easily portable and handheld, features that encouraged gamers to invest in consumables as the media became more 'popular' (Chandler, 1994; Lister et al, 2003).

As a key target for the marketing of new ICT products, the home and take up by families of media devices helped to establish a consumer-led ICT media market. For the young people at this time such developments had significant implications for the emergence of new social contexts and peer-based contact. Here the increasingly portable ICT media devices enabled young people to exercise a greater degree of autonomy away from their parents, which were part of new games and interactions with one another (Sanger et

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[13] *Images retrieved from addictedgeek.com and www.techtree.com*
[14] *Source: The History of Games 2006*

al, 1997; Buckingham, 2002). Another important point is that these game consoles were designed and marketed specifically for the youth consumer, where it was observed that children had a key role in the purchase of game and family media. Using the example of the video recorder, Gunter and Wober (1989) found that families with children were the earliest adopters of technology as parents felt 'under pressure' to make purchases.

2.4 Getting online with friends

During the 1980s and 1990s the home computer provided new forms and style of contact with peers. Where schoolwork was the emphasis by parents, young people enjoyed playing games, which led to new interactions with peers. The internet represented a crucial advancement to the modes of social communication and contact between young people. Launched in 1982 the Commodore 64 was one of the first home computers that offered user-to-user messaging if the device was connected to a dial-up modem (see timeline, figure 2.i, page 51). Communication with friends that could only take place through the parental-controlled landline phone could now occur for longer periods and more spontaneously, as friends 'logged on' to share 'online' communication. However, there was competition for use of the home landline, as households typically only had one output for phone connection and children had to negotiation with parents for use of the phone, internet and computer.

Figure 2.vii Image of the command-line driven interface of the Commodore 64[15]
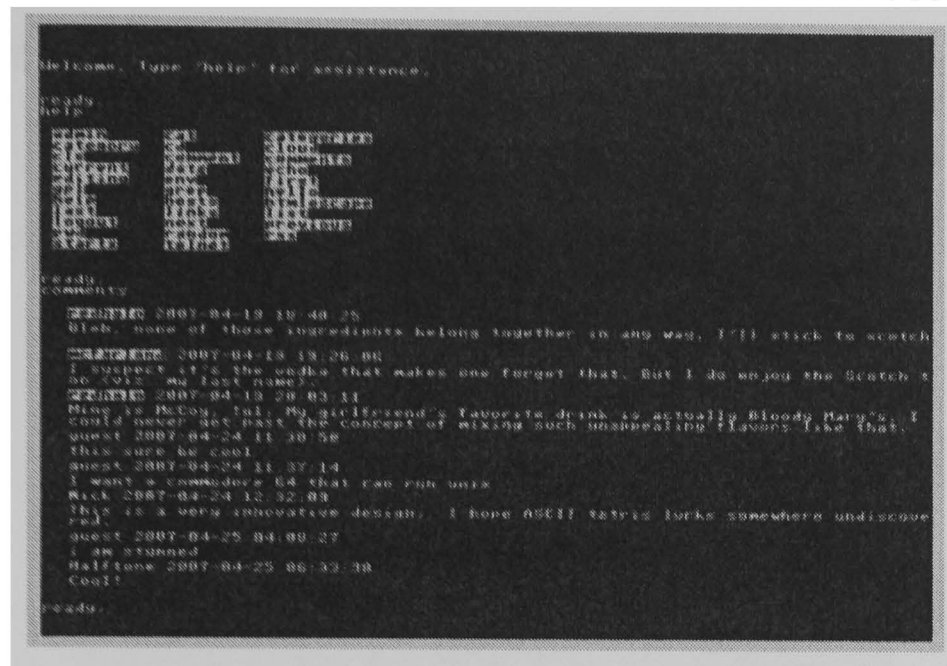
The above image shows the command-line driven interface of the
Commodore 64, which required a level of 'basic' computing expertise to use
the technology. As the medium became easier to use and more mainstream
in the 1990s, this kind of messaging became known as 'Instant Messaging'
(IM). IM represented a cheaper form of contact than the costly and bulky
mobile phones that were available at this time. For young people, IM was
also less conspicuous than conversations that could be overheard by the rest
of the family on the household landline. The accentuation on young people's
utilisation of this technology was introduced by the IM abbreviations that
quickly became an 'internet slang' or 'text speak' amongst peers to speed up
the efficiency of conversations and affirm the privacy of messages (Grinter,
2002). Emotional reactions can also be expressed in the same type of text
expressions, such as 'LOL' that stands for 'laugh out loud'. IM represents one
of the first occasions when real-time and synchronous 'conversations' could
flow between users, and where emotional reactions could also be part of the
same dialogue. This kind of communication was relatively unsophisticated
and difficult to engage in for long periods as the interface only allowed for
very basic commands. In 1993 the launch of the graphically driven web

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[15] *Image reproduced from r-echoes.net*

34

browser Mosaic allowed for a more intuitive navigation of the internet and communication with friends.

Figure 2.viii Screen shot of MOSAIC interface[16]
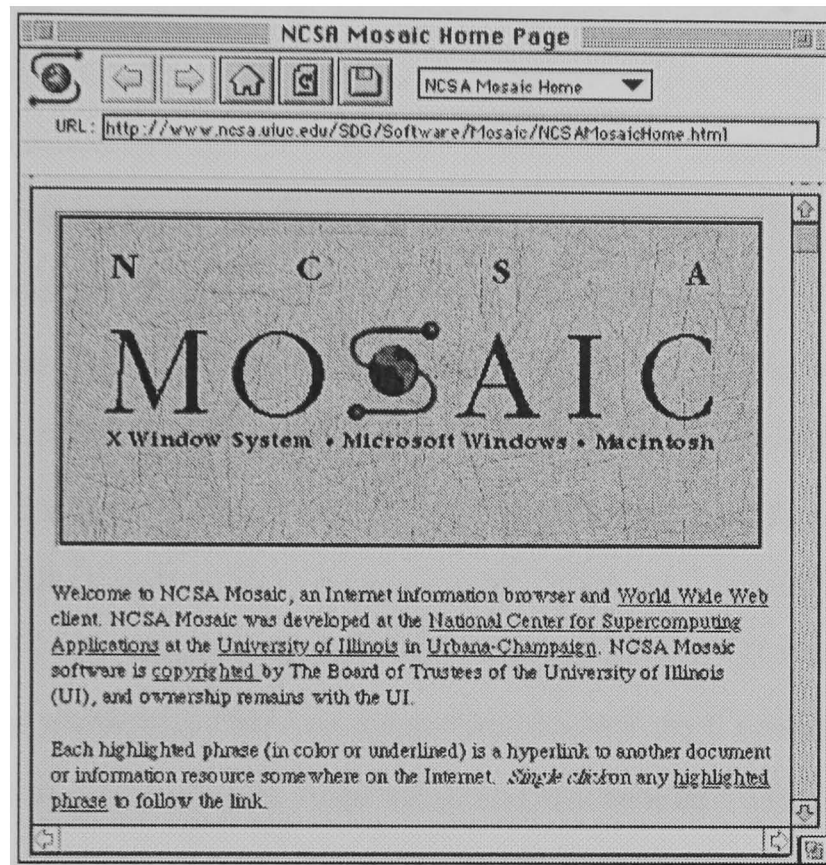
One of the main appeals of Mosaic was that it was the first browser to allow image and text to share the same window on the computer screen (see figure 2.viii above). Claimed to be '*easy*' to install, Mosaic was marketed as 'reliable' and immediately accessible to 'anyone' (Hudson 1997). The interface allowed users to 'point and click' through with a mouse rather than having to type code through a keyboard. Mosaic was regarded as 'ideal' for the 'lay' public who owned a Microsoft or Apple computer and who wanted access to the internet without having to learn lots of code or type html (the scripting language of web browsers) (Myers, 1998; Ayers, and Stasko; 1995). Mosaic was also followed by other web browsers such as Netscape and Internet Explorer which dominated in the early 1990s.

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[16] *Image reproduced from appleinsider.com*

In the mid 1990s the internet generated a short dot.com market boom that was seen to accentuate the possibilities of ICT media technology (Lister et al, 2003). At this time the potential was focused on the globalisation of business networks and mass-markets, which were seen to be able to transform economies into global leaders as business became, 'e-business', and government 'e-government' in charge of 'e-learning' (Leah et al, 2002). These expectations were given a further impetus by social commentators disseminating ideas about the 'information society', 'network society', 'knowledge economy' (e.g. Webster, 1995). The danger perceived by middle class parents was that without internet access their children were at risk of being 'unconnected', 'out of touch', and 'out of the loop' (Williams, 2006: 1). However, such disconnection was also weighted against a need to monitor and moderate effectively what were seen as 'open' and 'exposed' online spaces (Salbu, 1998; Schacter et al, 1998; Young, 1996). During the 1990s the internet was viewed as having separate 'online' and 'offline' domains that translated over to 'virtual' and 'real' realms (Maczewski, 2002). As Woolgar (2002) notes in the popular media and academic commentaries in the 1990s there was a hyperbole or 'cyberbole' about the internet that appeared to give access to previously unimagined spaces within which to experiment with identity and sociability. Not surprisingly, such opportunities were quickly identified as opening up new risks to children as pornography and other dangers were seen to reach inside the home. A market was created for books like *'Danger Zones: What Parents Should Know About the Internet'* (Biggar and Myers 1996) and a vast array of 'parental control' software. Kept within the home online media could be more easily kept under parental supervision and integrated into household routines and shared family rules of use (Livingstone, 2003). Young people had ever-increasing opportunities to gain entry to online domains, sharing friends' computers and using ICT resources, as a result it became increasingly difficult to monitor all modes and means of access, as well as the different online environments (Vieria, 2007).

With the increased sophistication of the web-based interface, media resources such as IM continue to hold an important youth appeal. For example the PEW American Life Project (2004) recorded that 62 percent of the total internet users who used IM were classified as 'Gen Y'.

Figure 2.ix Percent of each generation that IMs 2004[17]

Generation	Percentage users
Gen Y (ages 18-27, born 1977 or later)	62
Gen X (ages 28-39, born 1965-1976)	37
Trailing Boomers (ages 40-49, born 1946-1964)	33
Leading Boomers (ages 50-58, born 1946-1963)	29
Matures (ages 59-68, born 1936-1945)	25
After Work (age 69+, born 1935 or earlier)	29

Drawing from the statistics in the above table, with the highest percentage classified as 'young people', IM technology represents what can be considered as a significant 'rite of passage' for these users, where others have also recognised the communication medium as particular to teenagers and adolescents (e.g. Baron et al, 2006; Boneva et al, 2006; Schiano et al, 2002). Thus, whilst access to a home or school computer might have to be negotiated with others, IM represents a space that was discovered and quickly occupied by young people. Here, the communication was in the control of the user where messages could be ignored or recorded in a manner that was not possible with a telephone call. In addition 'friend lists' had to be created to be able to send and receive messages as part of an online account and social identity that was displayed to others. What I am suggesting is that the use of IM was one of the ways young people became familiar with new online communications and the web, and was the first way

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[17] *Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, February 2004. Margin of error is ±5%.*

that they began to set up *networks* of *known* friends. The PEW Report (2004) also showed that over half of Gen Y at 57 percent used IM more frequently than their use of email[18]. This suggests that these young people are the most practised and proficient in conversing with others in this medium across the web.

Therefore, for these young people, an important part of the knowledge and familiarisation with ICT media was the interactions and use by peers that became part of everyday social situations. Like the Sega and Nintendo handheld game consoles with which they occupied themselves with, play shares an importance as both a source of innovation and familiarity with technology in the lives of young users (Basalla, 1988). For example, if we consider the experience of *having* to use a PC for schoolwork, compared to the instances of game play with friends, we can return to Thrift's (1996) observation that technology must be seen as part of the dynamic processes of social and cultural emergence. Moreover, as Holloway and Valentine (2003:14) point out for the 'cyberkids' of the 1990s, the Information Age recast computing technology as "*things*' that materialise for children as diverse social practices' and which are a part of ongoing, 'relational' *processes*. This study takes a similar approach where the focus is on the *participation* between friends who use the same technology and the building of familiar social networks.

2.5 Personalised and mobile communications

Katz has described how young people were at the 'ground zero of the digital world' and experienced the opportunity to '*reinvent* communications, culture and community' (Sefton-Green, 1998:1, emphasis added). Part of such reinventions, as we have seen from the previous section, was the cultivation of connections and networks as these developed outside of the parental

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[18] *Source: PEW Internet & American Life Project Tracking Survey, February 2004.*

38

control. Most noticeable was the popularity of portable and handheld devices that the young people could purchase and personalise for themselves, such as the mobile phone.

The mobile phones of the 1980s were expensive and unreliable to use. These had usually been bought on a business contract and were only available in the most privileged of households that could afford the technology. For young people this meant that access was strictly limited, and controlled by their parents.

Figure 2.x Image of a First Generation mobile phone [19]

The first generation (1G) mobile handsets that were commercially available worked from a series of interlocking 'cells' (hence 'cell phone') and were expensive, bulky and with only a limited battery life. The earliest mobile user was captured in popular media as the 'yuppie'. In advertising the image of the 'on the move' entrepreneur was popularised in the early 1990s and captured the sensibilities of a new supposedly 'dynamic' work culture (Smyth, 2004). Alongside the work-based household PC the first mobile phones were designed to allow for business users to extend the work setting within the home domain. Since the industrial revolution these two spheres

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[19] *Image reproduced from http://www.techfresh.net*

had been kept separate for husbands and wives where there was allocated 'work' time and 'home' space (Hochschild, 1997). The mobile phone handset together with the portability of the home computer radically transformed the static boundaries of the household to incorporate more flexible working patterns that contributed to changes in the role of family members and dynamics of the home. Hence the initial ownership of mobile devices was a complement to rather than a replacement of the existing family landline and provided a functional link that was later mediated between parents and teenagers, rather than parents and work (Castells et al, 2007). Here, the transformation of the mobile phone was led by young people's desire for a personal mode of contact with friends and reduced parental control (Green, 2003). Indeed, the portability of mobile devices shaped the ways in which young people could create social events and connect to one another (e.g. Ito et al, 2005). Seen by some researchers as an 'uncharted territory' as no other 'generation of teens has had access to this type of technology' (Ling and Helmerson, 2000: 8-9); the speed of the take-up and use of mobile phones had a new social significance in the lives of young people (Brown et al, 2002; Ito et al, 2005).

It is likely that the first mobile device owned by young people was the Second Generation (2G) mobile phone technology that was available from the early 1990s. The unequal distribution of telecommunication infrastructures across the globe meant that mobile services followed different trajectories of organisation and development. In the United Kingdom British Telecom (BT) retained control over the wired telecommunications infrastructure. Originally the Post Office held the monopoly on commercial telecommunications, but this was later sold and divided between two main operators, Cellnet and Vodaphone (Lister et al, 2003). The mobile phone services became more competitive as network competition drove prices down and the launch of the pay-as-you-go tariff from the late 1990s made telecommunications an affordable option for many

who were under 18 years of age. First set up by the company Eircell in the Republic of Ireland in 1997 the service was marketed as a 'ready to go' or 'pre-pay' service. The price plans were deliberately targeted at the youth market, as they were not contingent on consumers having bank accounts or proof of age. One of the most successful price plans was Orange, 'Orange Everyday 50 talk plan' in 1999, which offered 50 minutes standard off-peak calls every day to other Orange mobiles or any local United Kingdom landline number. The calling plan was designed to be 'simple' to use and to have appeal to students who were on a tight budget and were high off-peak users. These 'low user' tariffs meant that the initial outlay for the customer was kept to a minimum while the cost of calling was still relatively expensive. The lowering of price plans in the early to mid 1990s was a deliberate strategy to attract more young people into the mobile phone market. Still at school and short on money the 'pay-as-you -go' commercial mobile phones offered Generation Y a 'cheap deal' and an alternative to the family landline. A popular option with teenagers as they had 'more free time, could live on a loose budget' and 'bought into' the telecommunications market-'logic' of brand development and social identification (Castells et al, 2007: 40). The mobile phone market was therefore quick to react to the new youth social consumer. This reflects the collapse of the distinction between public customer and the more professional high-end market user. In response the mobile phone industry saw profit potential in a youth led market, whose users wanted access to reliable voice-to-voice services, and other marketable add-ons such as text message bundles, camera, blue-tooth, infra-red and file-sharing (Carroll et al, 2002). At the end of the 1990s, mobile phone listed subscribers were at more than 15 million in the United Kingdom ('Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones IEGMP Report, 2007'). The substantive growth led to investment in new phone technology and the introduction of more affordable rates and technologically innovative handsets by the beginning of 2000s.

Two points are important to note here in terms of the attraction to a youth market. First there was a push by young users who wanted personal and mobile communication technology that would be approved by and could be used in conjunction with parents for on the move and more independent sociability. Second there was a pull by the phone manufactures who began to market directly to young people with affordable and 'trendy' handsets that allowed for ring tones and other personalised add-ons. For these particular young people this was the first time that they had had access to such technology, which helped to foster a definable set of cultural and social values based on the accessibility of others and mobility of communication. Hence the affordability of the mobile provided new freedoms of expression that were seen as 'empowering' (Geser, 2004). Indeed, the introduction of services such as Short Messaging Service (SMS), 'text-messaging', or 'texting' to use the popular term were a complement to the 'cheap' and 'straight-forward' price plans of pre-pay and pay-as-you-go and form an important part of the new freedoms of expression (Green, 2003). One of the advantages of the mobile phone for young people was that it offered a means of communication that could be 'independent' and outside of more formal rules and regulations from parents (Ito et al, 2005).

It is worth taking a closer look here at the take-up of text messaging as this provides a prime example of some of the youth-led aspects of mobile media. Indeed, as Calcutt (2001) has argued, 'Texting took mobiles out of the hands of 1990s yuppies and (...) confirmed the idea of texting as a sub-cultural activity' (online). As new consumers, the lifestyle choice of the users was just as important as the functionality of the technology itself. In essence this centred on what has been termed as the 'choosing self' at the centre of consumerism (Sassatelli, 2000). Like IM before it, the poor quality interface of text messaging was part of the appeal of the medium, as young people sought to overcome limitations (Taylor and Harper, 2003). Texts were restricted to a text-based typescript and could only contain 160-characters.

Similar shared slang vocabularies like those across IM were a marker of distinction amongst young people and were distinct to this group where other generations found it hard to penetrate the 'art of txt spk' as the cartoon below illustrates (Bucholtz, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003).

Figure 2.xi Cartoon showing the language of text speak[20]

Text communication does not require 'proper' sentence structures or formal grammar arrangements and has meant that texting emerged as a new form of informal 'youth language' (Grinter and Eldridge, 2003). This reflected a shared youth identity that carried with it new sets of social protocols (Green, 2007; Thurlow and Brown, 2003). This same sociability has been reported in the press as a 'universal media experience' where, according to Orange magazine, 'If you don't have a mobile, you're effectively a non-person' (spring, 2001). In Australia similar reports labelled these young people as a 'Generation text: Young, free but tied to the mobile' (Bryden-Brown, 2001:4). In this instance texting is as much about the shared and 'private' connections to peers, as a disconnection from the 'public' world of adults. Mobile phone texting followed on from IM as a new symbolic mode of communicative language created by young people and for young people.

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[20] Image reproduced from, http://www.cartoonstock.com

New technologies were beginning to take on new meanings and allowed young people to mould and to play around with media. Strathern (1992) describes 'domestic technologies' as 'enabling' where they 'amplify people's experiences, options, choices', moreover, she goes on to describe how media, '*compel* people to communicate' (Strathern, 1992: ix). Texting marked a significant mode of consumer power that was led by young people, where technological take up, use and commodification had symbolic power in the expression of youth identity (Ling, 2000). Indeed, such was the popularity of this new *informal* communication that this gave very rapid rise to a new social sensibility that was based on the social desire to always be 'in touch' or 'textable', and was seen as part of, 'Being a Teenager" (Weilenmann and Larsson, 2000). This sensibility has been advanced by the popular cultural image of the 'texting' and 'distracted' teen and today texting represents the '...most widely used social communications system in the mobile phone-using world' (Green, 2007: 124).

2.6 Technology as a cultural status

The 1990s marked the convergence of media such as the mobile phone, cameras and MP3s that defined a 'way of life' and lifestyle for young people. One of the most notable 'cult' products that has emerged as a prime identifier of youth in recent years has been Apple's iPod music player. The first iPod was released in 2001 and marks a significant 'tipping point' in the consumerism and expressive identity of young consumers (Gladwell, 2002). Below figure 2.xii provides a snapshot of the cult status of the iPod 'through the ages'.

Figure 2.xii The iPod through the ages[21]
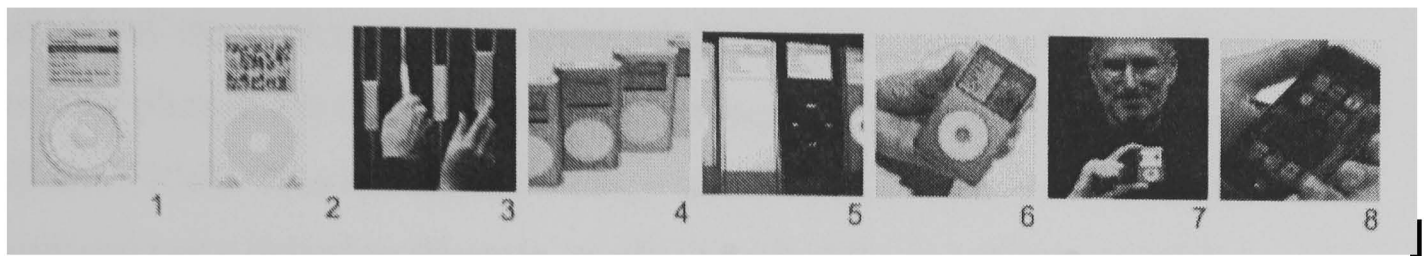
Unlike the mobile phone, the iPod was a product that was deliberately marketed *from the start* to have a lasting appeal to a 'young' and 'stylish' consumer demographic. Thus, the design was as much a part of the 'desirability' of the product as the function of playing and retrieving music files (Blythe and White, 2005). More recently the iPhone is another example of where media extend their appeal through a 'sexy' design and 'easy-to-use' user-interface, with a 'physically transparent' interface that 'creates the feeling of a near-seamless interplay between the body and machine' (Beer and Gane, 2008: 107). The iPod stands as a cultural symbol that had meaning not just peer-to-peer, but a social statement that could be interpreted by others, even if they did not share an interest in it. For example, the white headphones are a distinctive and 'fashionable' emblem, which are worn by users. Writing about youth culture for *The Observer* newspaper, the social commentator Naughton (2005) has identified how this is a 'generation lost in its personal space', where the 'distinctive white buds' of iPod headphones means that individuals are 'unaware' and 'wrapped in a portable, personal bubble of sound' (*The Observer*, 2005). Gurwitch (2006) also makes the association between youth identity and the popularisation of what is a 'youth cult product', heralding the iPod as the 'electronic fountain of youth'. On the strength of this kind of youth consumption, American youth identity has been branded recently as endemic of an 'iPod Generation' (Katayama, 2007).

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21 *Image reproduced from 'iPod through the ages'. The Technology Guardian 2007.*

In the early 2000s, the iPod was identified as the second most popular 'back to school' item for returning school students (Ling, 2005). As with the first mobile phones the iPod reflects and reinforces a particular youth culture (Beer, 2006). This kind of technology allows for the easy personalisation of cultural taste linked to lifestyle, in effect part of the marketing appeal promoted by Apple stands as, if you 'own an iPod', you can share a youth trend. A consequence of the success of the iPod and other music share players (MP3s) is that the sharing of music files has enabled new social activities and created opportunities for interaction on websites that are organised around music taste and networks of contacts, such as MySpace. Writing in the *Independent* newspaper, Blacker (2005) notes this trend when he describes how,

> 'suddenly, the music you love is no longer represented by tapes, CDs and records (...) It is gathered neatly and unavoidably in one place, a perfect snapshot of your inner life'.

Traditionally music has held a compelling place in the development of youth culture that has been associated with social style and identity (Bennett, 2002). Previously the Mods and Rockers, and Punks and Hippies organised and expressed a shared identity around music (Jefferson, 1976; Cohen, 1987). In more recent years we have seen significant changes to music culture and the related technology. For example, where, for the sketches outlined in the vignettes in the previous chapter, Lisa identified with the 1980s Sony Walkman, Jennifer the use of CDs and minidiscs, and Penny experienced the shift toward what Beer (2008: 223) identifies as 'virtual cultural artefacts', where individuals download digital music files. Indeed, to follow the decade trajectory from the 1980s to 2000s outlined by the vignettes we can note a shift in the culture of music sharing, listening and enjoyment. This shift can be observed by the increasing personalisation of the ownership of music, and other forms of media, such as films and television. Indeed, as Beer (2006) notes one of the casualties of this kind of cultural media engagement was the final showing of the long running

analogue music show *Top of the Pops*. As a result there is a shift from the physical ownership of such media toward the 'virtual', 'or at least toward complex imbrications of virtual and physical artefacts in everyday musical practices' (Beer, 2008: 223).

Thus, part of the iPod's popularity is that it gives membership to an implicit (exclusive) community and provides a form of social 'bonding' (Jain, 2004). Steven Levy's (2004) article for *NewsWeek*, 'iPod Nation' noted how 'in just three years, Apple's adorable mini music player has gone from gizmo to life-changing cultural icon' (Levy, 2004). The appeal of technology like the mobile phone and the iPod is that they are quickly identifiable as 'new' innovative technology that offer portability and can be owned independently to facilitate social action in a way that is separate and entirely unique. This is important in the eyes of a youth-led consumer culture, where such media represent a highly visible and recognisable social marker to others (Ito et al, 2005). Indeed, according to Bauman 'personal and self-definition', are exploited by the consumer culture that 'artificially' encourages certain *'styles of life'* (emphasis added 1992: 189). The emergence of this particular youth culture is linked to consumer choice based on music taste, file shares and communities of music based 'friends' as part of a 'decentralised media', which has been recognised a part of the 'rise of a second media age' (Beer, 2006). The new forms of communication developed quickly and became a part of the contemporary fashion and mode of social interaction, particularly amongst teenagers. In this context, technology like the iPod can be seen as an icon of music sharing and taste, as well as a particular social and cultural way of life. Hence, the use of ICT media reflects and reinforces young people's emerging sense of identity and the ways in which they make sense of a complex social world. Moreover, the movement toward, what can be described as networked technologies can be understood as a shift toward a participatory and collaborative set of social and cultural engagement which hold particular appeal for young people especially when such engagement is

focused around music (Beer, 2008). The example of such technology includes the launch of the Social Network Site (SNS) MySpace in 2003, which forms the basis for the discussion of what I identify as the progression of 'social media' in the lives of young people in the next chapter.

2.7 Identification of the most engaged media users

Up to this point the generality of this chapter has allowed me to describe the various manifestations of ICT media and consumer technology within everyday life in the lives of the first generation of young people to have access to such devices and resources. Now I want to turn the focus of the chapter from the technology, to the type of user. In the first part of the chapter I discussed the categorisation of the cultural phenomenon of ICT media led by the Generation Y. Where the focus in this thesis is about the associated media in the lives of young, middle class people there needs to be a further identification of the main group that has been studied. To help with this identification, I have devised a typification of the social characteristics of the most engaged users of media, which I term 'SMART'.

Figure 2.xiii Table showing the characteristics of SMART

SOCIAL	Refers to the way that the young people make use of media for communication, the cultivation of social networks and how it is manifest as integral to *everyday* sociability.
MOBILE[22]	The group are quick to respond to changes in social arrangements. They let things occur 'of-the-moment', where communications are often unplanned and spontaneous. Mobile is also used to refer to a geographic mobility, where the young people are part of a group that is confident with independent travel and are likely to have friends located worldwide.

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[22] *'Mobile' is not about a social mobility as this characterisation deals with only middle class young people.*

48

ACADEMIC	Refers to the life-situation of the young people in this study, who were first year undergraduate students commencing university in 2005. This also relates to the access to media resources, as some of the web-based resources that will be discussed in the next chapter are shown to be gated to only university users and bear a particular significance in this study (e.g. the Social Networking Site (SNS) Facebook).
REAL	Describes how young people are devoted to their media, where they form and make expectations based on what are perceived to be *real* social actions that have *real* social consequences. This is distinct from previous 'cyber' and 'virtual' technologies as new spaces for interactions. The forging of additional connections to unknown others or 'virtual strangers' does not hold appeal for this group. The emphasis is on the reproduction of known relations and replication of known networks of friends across various forms of media. The notion of a 'cyber' relationship with others is not an appropriate way to understand the reflexive qualities that characterise the media based interactions of this group. Instead their emphasis is on the convergence and synchronisation with established relationships and connections as a condition of using media resources. In this way part of the appeal of the technology is that it cannot be defined as either 'virtual' or 'artificial'.
TECHNOLOGY	Refers to the proficient and expected use of media that forms an important part of everyday interactions between friends. This group have a committed relationship with the media that they use, and choose to participate with others as part of constant connections and rarely ever disconnected.

The above characteristics were formed out of the data in recognition of the most engaged and committed users of technology. This relates to the young people whose day-to-day social and practical competencies go hand-in-hand with the latest innovations. I had previously characterised this group as the, 'iGeneration' to reflect the emphasis on internet-based resources, and in response to the status of consumerables such as the iPod and more recently the iPhone (Hardey, 2007). However, in the course of writing up the study, I have had time to reflect on this term, and decided that 'generation' was misleading in this context where it is generally used to typify a broader social group. The specifics of the young people in this study are those middle class children who were the first to have grown up in a 'cyber' or 'digital' age and

are now the most engaged users of new technology at university (e.g. Calvert, Jordan, and Cocking, 2002; Holloway and Valentine, 2003; Montgomery, 1996, 2007).

2.8 Conclusion

The popularity of the cultural phenomenon of ICT media raises questions about the impact that these have on behaviour and self-identity. The devices and technologies that have been described here were important in the lives of the young people who can be characterised as being 'SMART', and have now converged and morphed into one device. For example, the mobile phone, mp3 player, games machine, video machine and digital camera are now frequently incorporated into one device. Moreover, such devices are mobile so that the user carries around with them technologies that a decade ago could only be supported by a separate, desk-bound and relatively costly, complex, slow and unreliable technology. The technology based 'anything-anywhere-anytime dream' noted by Graham (2005) may not have yet been realised, in that geography, space and the body still matter in mundane everyday communication. However, the ICT media first used by these users as children has become an accepted and expected part of their lives. Perhaps there is a stimulatory here with the place of television in the lives of the Baby Boomers. Technology therefore has a central place in the lives of most citizens and where the young people in this chapter were the first to grow up with and share the rapid developments of new digital products in the 1980s and 1990s, they were also a key population for the marketing of new products that became less expensive and easier to use over this period. From this foundation, in the next chapter I begin to explore the emerging relationship between ICT media, and the utilisation of the newest forms as part of what I term 'social media'.

Figure 2.i Timeline of the main ICT media 1980s – 2000s

ICT Media Timeline 1980 -2003

1982 Commodore 64

1984 First Apple Computer

1984 Sony's first Discman

1989 Nintendo Game Boy

2003 Apple launch itunes

1985 Super Mario Bros

1994 Sony Playstation

1982 First CD

1999 Digital Recorder

1980   1982   1984   1986   1988   1990   1992   1994   1996   1998   2000   2002

1983 First commercial mobile Motorola DynaTAC

1997 Pay-as-you-go mobile tariff

2001 First Apple ipod

1993 MOSAIC

Aug 1st 1981 Launch of MTV

1988 Launch of Sega Mega Drive

2003 Launch of SNS MySpace

- Chapter Three -
Social Media in the Age of Web 2.0

Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the concept of 'social media', which is used to frame the specific timing of the technologies during the course of the research. This sets the scene for a discussion of the emergence of the increasingly networked and personalised set of associations that are characteristic of the lives of the research participants. The chapter falls into two parts. The Part 1 situates social media within the context of what has been categorised as a 'Web 2.0', the second version of the web. Later there is a shift in focus that examines the role of the user. Here, I suggest that social media have become increasingly significant in everyday life, as the technology is underpinned by a *participatory* mode of engagement. I go on to argue that SNSs represent the *emergence* of a networked and increasingly personalised set of associations in the lives of the young people that are the subject of this study. As an outline to the main case study of the research I take the reader through what is framed as an informal 'Guide to Facebook', which situates the site as part of the main focus for the later data analysis. The guide is intended to explain the site's main functionalities and features during the time of the research. This provides a necessary backdrop to the analysis of social practices that is embedded as part of social media. Part II engages with the necessary background literature of cyberspace which is framed by the conceptualisation of identity. With particular reference to both the work of Goffman (1963) and Mead (1934) the 'stable' but 'emergent' identities that I describe in the analysis are framed by the crossing from online and offline; real and virtual dualities to a more sophisticated *social* sensibility.

3.1 Social media in context

'ICT media' as a generic term was a useful contextual foundation for the socio-historic background described in the previous chapter. In this chapter, and throughout the rest of the thesis, I have devised the term 'social media', to describe the emergent web-based software applications that are relevant to the study. To provide some justification for the use of this definition, I turn to the various and broad definitions of the web that have predominantly been devised by those who work in the technology and media related industries, or refer to a specific period of the web's development. For example, research conducted in the 1990s was typified by the web as a 'cyberspace' (e.g. Kendall, 1993; Holloway and Valentine, 2003; Turkle, 1994; 1995; Livingstone, 1999). More recently commentators have been keen to advocate that we are presently engaged with a 'Web 2.0' (e.g. Millard and Ross, 2006; O'Reilly and Musser, 2006). My hesitation to use this term is motivated by a sense of caution about the artificial application of the label 'Web 2.0', which has been designed to capture the attention of the popular media and be attractive to marketing and commercial industry. Tim O'Reilly's (2004) widely used definition of a 'Web 2.0' emerged in the course of a conference organised by his publishing and marketing company O'Reilly Media. At a speech given by O'Reilly (2004) at the conference he outlines how he foresaw a 'new version of the Web', that advanced from the static, point-click Web 1.0 to a,

> *network* as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an 'architecture of participation,'

and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences'

Since O'Reilly's (2004) speech the label Web 2.0 has been widely publicised and incorporated within business plans, marketing strategies and media organisations such as the BBC. Indeed, the term is commonly used by new businesses that claim to be 'Web 2.0 Start Ups' to promote a sense of innovation and by established companies who seek to utilise the software that O'Reilly's organisation helped popularise (Jackson, 2007). For example, the 'architectures of participation' that are highlighted by O'Reilly (2005) refer to the software that provides the means whereby users can collaborate and 'share' resources (Nickull et al, 2008). If we view the category Web 2.0 as predominantly technocratic and marketing led, it is necessary to identify a more concise and appropriate definition of the mediated resources used by those who are the subject of this thesis. I do this by turning to the data and focusing on how the participants were *using* the web-based resources and had talked about their mediated social practices, hence the term 'social media'. It is evident that 'social' is an essential element of any categorisation and the label 'media' captures the way participants value the visual, intuitive and interactive nature of the technologies they use. Together these combine to highlight the main aspects of a bottom-up, and user led dynamic that is intended to refer to the technology and media resources of the time, rather than a specific social group or historic period.

In a sense social media represents the 'turning upside down' of the technology and marketing led categorisation of Web 2.0. This enables a social perspective to be taken that moves away from definitions in terms of collections or 'versions' of technologies or 'architectures of participation'. For example, Google's AdSense platform, various other web-based application interfaces, as well as the more obvious blogs and Social Networking Sites all constitute the Web 2.0 (Anupriya, 2007; O'Reilly, 2005). However, this approach is limited as, it has been argued, it fails to capture the

sense of social engagement experienced by users. To put it crudely, social media represents the user-centred and interactive elements of the resources that are routinely assembled and used by people as part of their everyday social practices. A key feature of social media is the re-emphasis of the social elements of the software, both in terms of the design and usability. This draws attention to the, 'mass participation in social activities' that form an integral component of technology (Jarrett, 2008). Within this context, I borrow from Richards (2006) observations about Web 2.0, which is modelled on a, 'generative interactivity', but propose that social media is focused on the 'co-participation' of interactions, rather than the individual who is depicted as a 'produser' (Bruns, 2008). 'Produser' refers to only one aspect of the interaction and technological engagement. In this representation the user can only ever be defined by the information they produce and content they create. By comparison, social media suggests a more sophisticated dynamic to social actions, that can include the creation, sharing, invention, navigation, uploading and so on of numerous modes of engagement. This development is also accompanied by 'a new form of interactive culture', where the emphasis is on the patterns of interactions between users, for example the 'time consuming the content generated by (and with) others' (Beer and Gane, 2008: 149).

Whilst O'Reilly's speech provides only a very broad contextualisation of the delineations of a Web 2.0-based media, the important point to acknowledge is that much of the technical knowledge that was a requirement of a version Web 1.0 is now undertaken and automatically (and freely) sorted by the software (Graham, 2005; Bilder, 2006; Fiadeiro, 2007). In terms of social media, my point is that the main dimensions of the technology is about user engagement, rather than the construction of the latest version of the web. Another way of approaching this is through the users' *use* the resources. The main forms of social media that are relevant to this study include the following resources:

Social Network Sites (SNS): Sites that are based on personal profiles and pages, to connect with friends, for communication and to share content. These are shaped by friend-based networks such as MySpace, Bebo and Facebook, and also support networks as a by-product for content sharing, e.g. photos, messages etc.

Archive and content sharing sites: These sites are typically hosted as a 'community platform' for the sharing of web-based context, such as image files and video content.   Prime examples are http://www.flickr.com/ and http://www.youtube.com/, which are used to navigate publically available content and allow users to post their own files for others to share. These services are also popular with users who use the sites as a photograph and video archive. Part of the attraction of the sites has been the ability to tag and browse published content as a folksomony[23].

Blogs: A personal website, based on posted entries that are displayed in chronological order. Blogs are usually informal with a conversational style and contain a mixture of text, images and media objects. The style of presentation means that one user can update them, or group contributors can add posts. For example, http://www.techcrunch.com/, a group-edited blog about technology Start-Ups and Web 2.0, and my own blog, http://properfacebooketiquette.blogspot.com/

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[23]   *Folksomony definition: Also known as collaborative tagging or social indexing. The term is typically used to describe the practice of collaboratively creating and managing content on the web through tagging. Wikipedia notes that 'Folksonomy describes the bottom-up classification systems that emerge from social tagging'* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folksonomy

Microblogging: A form of 'bite-sized' blogging where users write brief text updates (usually less than 200 characters) and can publish them as part of a publically broadcast stream of conversations. The microblogging site http://twitter.com/ also allows users to keep their updates 'private' and send and retrieve messages to friends. This method involves the use of '@' to denote a specific user, which is then followed by the content of the message, for example, '@mazphd' would send a message direct to my Twitter profile.

Social bookmarking: method for organising web content, which can in effect be 'saved' and retrieved in the same way as a web browser bookmark. Users can also share, store, classify, rate, and comment on searched for links with others. The most popular social bookmarking sites include, http://delicious.com/, and http://digg.com/.

User-review site: Is a website where users post reviews for products or services. These fall into three main categories, the first are 'product reviews', which include reviews of goods like books, clothes, wines e.g. http://www.reevoo.com/ and http://www.amazon.co.uk/. The second include, 'profession reviews', which publish appraisals of professionals such as teachers and doctors, e.g. http://www.ratemyprofessors.com/ and http://www.ratemds.com/social/. The third are 'service reviews' that include restaurants and hotels e.g. http://www.tripadvisor.com/ and http://trustedplaces.com/.

Peer2Peer: A type of ad-hoc free file-sharing based on peer-to-peer networks, users can search public folders for MP3s, documents, software, videos and more. Features include, unlimited simultaneous searches, and 'swarm downloading' where files are retrieved from

57

multiple host servers. E.g. http://www.bittorrent.com/ and http://www.limewire.com/.

Wikis: These sites include the collaboration of work from different authors and contributors. The premise of a wiki site is that it allows *anyone* to edit, delete, or modify the published content. One of the most popular wiki's, http://www.wikipedia.org/ provides links to guide the user to related pages with additional information.

Each of the above resources can all be classified as social media. Each one is inherently 'social' in that it is defined by the social practices of users and is not confined to any one technological device or mediated application. For example, the SNS, Facebook on one level appears to be a web-site. However, at another level, the social practices of users mean that they move seamlessly across the applications as they incorporate new information and connect to other resources. This suggests that social media is not a finite list of technologies or set to the Web 2.0 pages of the web, but describes the way people create, assemble, interact with and distribute information across a range of resources. Therefore, social media are inherently heterogeneous and involve any number of, what under Web 1.0, would be thought of as specific websites or web-pages. Social media is also emergent or, to use Web 2.0 terminology 'beta', in that people continuously incorporate and adapt information and develop different ways of using it, for example locating a favourite coffee bar via GoogleMaps on iPhone. In this way the information that people create and exploit relates to their and others biographies, social lives and lived experiences. Social media are therefore collaborative or participative because users create, monitor and use content (Beer and Burrows 2007). The notion of the 'user' does not in this case relate to a passive role (cf. Web 1.0) but to an *active* engagement with media and the lives of other users. What I am suggesting is that it is the revealing and sharing of social content that contextualises the media and makes the

resources be seen as valuable. This serves to differentiate social media from web spaces within which people play with identities or adopt an anonymous presence. For example, Second Life constitutes social media only in the instance where users adopt or incorporate it into the material as opposed to fantasy identity.

3.2 The role of social media users

I have begun to outline some of the main forms and most popular resources of social media. In this section I take a closer look at the role of the user. My emphasis in this study is on the social practices and interactions of the users, rather than to follow a technologically deterministic framework. This approach complements the main aspects of social media that I draw out in the analysis and focuses on the user engagement. There are two important aspects to the way users engage with social media; the first is based on the perceived *'openness'* of the resources, and the second is about the *control* and *ownership* of data (e.g. Albrechtslund, 2008; Jarrett, 2008). We can describe the contributory practices of social media as being based on 'collective information' (Scholz, 2008; Zimmer, 2008). For example, Wikipedia is considered as 'useful' because of the ways that users contribute, edit and keep up-to-date the published content. In essence, this puts in place the function of the site as a *conduit* for access to shared information, which is then underpinned by the shared *interactions* that occur across the networks. The implication here is that the user is seen as a 'co-developer', both of the network information and data (Wilson, 2006). This refers to the way that the software is 'freely' created and openly accessed. Given that the role of the user is to post 'relevant' and 'interesting' information, there is a level of implied trust and expectation within these interactions. For example, on Wikipedia the information must fit with the speciality of the site (in this case as a wiki), as well as other users' perception of the value of site content. In this context, if a user is to update with false information they are quickly 'found out' by others in the network and the information is then modified.

59

This kind of user engagement has echoes with Surowiecki's (2005) notion of the 'wisdom of crowds'; where collective codes of certain behaviour and established networks of trust coordinate interactions. Another pertinent example of this kind of collaboration is the social bookmarking site Digg. The site works as a public 'bookmark' resource, where bookmarked web-content is collated by users. Classified as 'stories', each bookmark posting then receives a rating based on the popularity of the item. The story that has received a high enough number of 'Diggs' or votes, then jumps to the main homepage where it is ranked in a hierarchy with the other rated posts. For example, the screen grab (figure 3.i) below shows the Top Digg stories on Tuesday, 30 September 2008 at 18:23pm. With 7,303 Diggs from other users, the American based story, 'Bailout Doesn't Pass' is the top-rated leading item. The contributory aspects of Digg mean that content is driven by user interest (on this day, from the world economy and American elections, to a comedy sketch titled, 'Instant Heart Attack') and always stay within the software protocols and design of the site.

Figure 3.i Image of a screen shot from Digg.com
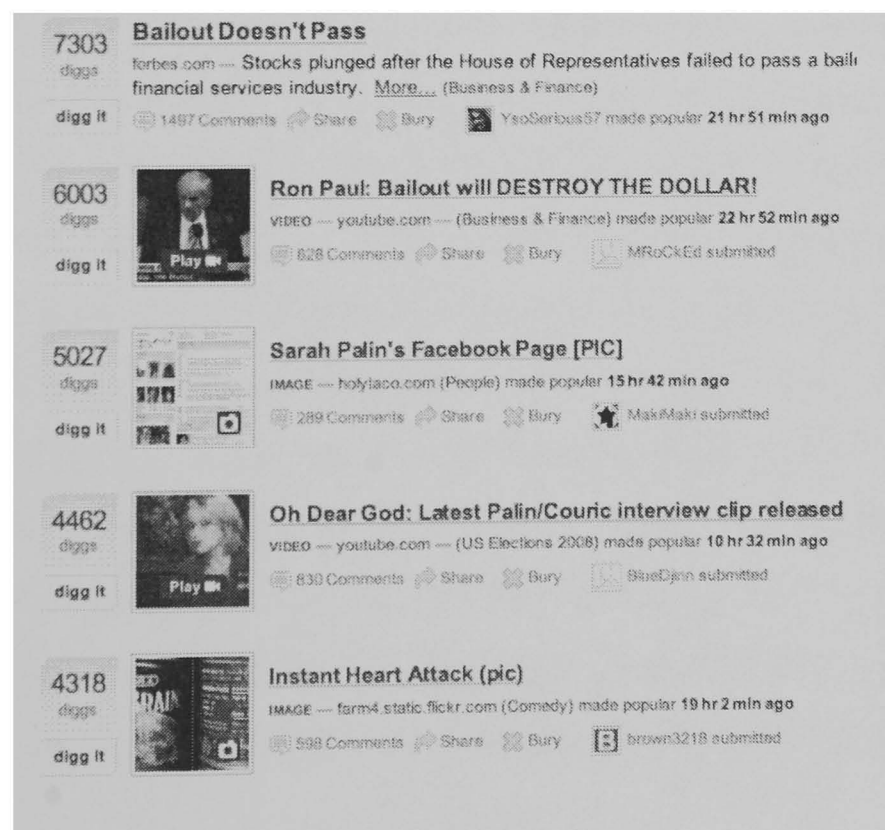
Social media resources like Digg and Wikipedia suggest that there has been a reconfiguration of the expectations of the uses of the sites where, 'interactive systems (...) enable the participation of users in production and social interaction' (Jarrett, 2008). As a result there is renewed emphasis on the user to have knowledge, and to make use of, collaborative and of-the-moment resources. Increasingly this type of participation is shaped by the interaction of the user as they, 'search', 'tag', 'review', 'network', 'connect' and 'share'. In his book *Shaping Things*, Sterling (2005) talks about a possible future where every object broadcasts its own history, and where people have become 'wranglers' who follow these objects. The image of the wrangler encourages the idea of the user as continually *active,* as the creator and innovator of content. In this way it is the user who gives meaning to content as they upload, download and share information across social media.

The user-review sites TrustedPlaces and TripAdvisor make clever use of such streams of 'user production', where these form the infrastructure of the site and become an integrated part of opportunities for users to interact with one another. For example on TrustedPlaces, once a user review has been uploaded, other users can place comments, bookmark, tag and modify the content to include another rating, image or video as part of the review. Such sites can be considered as 'peer-reviewed' and part of a participatory or '*con*culture', where the 'con' stands for convergence, and the role of the user is as a contributor and qualifier of information (Jenkins, 2006). Some commentators have argued that such public involvement has led to a loss in the 'quality' of information, which risks a new impoverishment of media content (Keen, 2007). In this context, the proliferation of personal blogs is seen to trivialise information, in a way that has added to the loss of 'expert' authority. Others have argued that user-based interaction, whether through SNSs or blogs, have given rise to what has been described as 'we media', or 'citizen media' (e.g. Schaffer, 2007; Leadbeater, 2008). For example, for the

2008 Olympics in Beijing the bloggers in China were seen as a valuable source for news that was outside state control.

Whilst social media seem open and unrestricted, it is important to note that the ownership and control of information, as well as the role of the user is far from clear-cut. To a certain extent the user has command of how they contribute, what they post, the blogs that they subscribe to, and website resources that they access. However, how web content can be accessed and how it is managed is still in the hands of the site 'owner'. For example, many users of the web are familiar with the site Google as a web search application; what is easy to forget is that the data and information that is sourced is in effect 'owned' and controlled by Google. If a romantic view could be taken of social media it would be one that valorises 'crowds', 'connections' and 'community'. It would be wrong to imply that social media is symbolic of an anti-business or not-for-profit ethic. Indeed, the commercial possibilities on offer are only beginning to be realised, as corporations begin to set up their own blogs (e.g. BBC blog network[24] and TopShop blog[25]) and to organise a network presence on SNS (e.g. Vodafone Group on Facebook and the numerous music artists on MySpace). Here, the profitability and commercial potential of social media remains as important a business model as the Web 1.0 dot.com boom in the 1990s. My argument is that the distinguishing feature for social media is in terms of how the resources are understood as user-led, network-based and peer-to-peer driven. Indeed in this context, the role of the user may be subject to processes similar to those Thrift (2005) identified as 'knowing capitalism'. By this I mean to draw attention to how users keep 'tabs' on one another as well as the functionality of the software to display relevant data. From a business model, such dynamics may prompt others into action, for example to purchase the same book from Amazon, or to go out to the same restaurant

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[24] http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/
[25] http://www.topshop.com/blog/2006/10/Oct_31_2.html

after reading a review on TrustedPlaces. In other words, to put it crudely, information has a value and, as I will go on to suggest, shapes the lives, behaviours and networks of the users.

3.3 Social Network Sites (SNSs)

So far I have outlined the ever more participatory role of the user in the production and consumption of social media content. In effect, such social media have become what Resnick et al (2000) anticipated as 'reputation systems' where it was expected that personal experiences and personalisation of resources underpin interactions. One of the key-defining features of these interactions is the generation of *networks*. Indeed as Beer and Gane (2008: 15) mention, social networks have been viewed as part of the 'driving force' of new technologies as 'networkable media' along which the corresponding 'social forms (...) are both a driver and an outcome' This describes how users are responsible for ways in which they source, store and respond to content. Taken at its most simplistic a network is a set of ties that link together users, content, pages, sources, information and data (Hogan, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, forthcoming 2008). The transference of personal details and personalised information underline the network connections as they take place across social media. SNSs can be considered as a natural extension of these associations, and provide a 'one point' stop, store and share for network resources.

For Web 1.0, the assumed function of online social networking was to 'facilitate interactions between strangers', the prime example being online dating sites (Lampe et al 2006; Ellison et al 2006). The key word here is *online*. In terms of social media, a different set of relationships takes shape. Unlike *anonymous* and only online social *networking*, the stress is on the *identifiable* and true to life networks that capture the 'real' relationships and reflect real 'offline' networks (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Part of the success of SNSs has been down to the centralisation of social media, which includes the

convergence of other media resources, such as the sharing of music from MP3's across MySpace and photographic images across Flickr. Moreover, in the context of Generation Y despite, as Beer (forthcoming) reminds us, the apparent elusiveness that surrounds what is considered 'cool', SNSs are such a mode of expression for young people today (boyd, 2006a; Livingstone, 2008).

At the most basic level, SNSs function to connect people together. The term 'networking' has been used to describe SNSs interactions, and this has been equally interchangeable with the label 'social networks' (boyd and Ellison, 2007). For boyd and Ellison (2007) there is a subtle (but important) distinction between the use of SNSs as a portal for sociability as 'networking' and as a portal to meet and extend associations with others, as a 'network'. Hence, the motivation for participating on a SNS, whether to 'network' or for 'networking' are crucial to the types of sites that users join and access. The SNSs that are relevant to this study include those that are designed to facilitate friend-based interactions such as Bebo, MySpace and Facebook. The main distinguishing feature is that they are sites intended for 'friend'-based connections, and the collective contribution and sharing of social content. Other SNSs like LinkedIn share the same network structure of the site, but serve a significantly different purpose. For example, LinkedIn is based on 'professional networks' and connections for career and business opportunity, rather than the more personal connections on Facebook[26]. SNSs are significant in this research as they represent a cultural shift from the ICT media in Chapter Two, to the ubiquity and importance of social media resources in the lives of the young and middle class today.

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[26] *For more information about LinkedIn, please refer to the About page on the site at:* http://www.linkedin.com/static?key=company_info&trk=hb_ft_abtli

SNSs provide a free-to-access and personalised network of connections, which are for the act of immediate communication, production and the consumption of personalised content as shared with nominated friends. Whilst blogs, wikis and review sites were based on a similar foundation of production and consumption, these lacked the network association of 'friends'. We can return here to the importance of the personalisation of resources. As I outlined in Chapter Two, the take up of ICT media by peers held significant cultural value in the eyes of young people as these were based upon the personalised commodification of devices (e.g. ring tones on a mobile phone, play lists on a MP3 Player). One prime example of the extension of these amenities was the SNS MySpace, that made use of consumers' play lists and music files for MP3, and at the same time provided a network to share these with 'online friends' (boyd, 2006a). SNSs are built on the associations between individuals that, to follow Graham (2005), are 'software-sorted'. The infrastructure and main navigation features of the site underpin this kind of sorting. These include the:

- ability to set up and modify a personal profile page;
- support of user-generated content;
- encouragement and facilitation of connections and interaction;
- representation of multiple information shares, e.g. friend lists, image uploads etc;
- categorisation of the same social identifiers, e.g. education and work information, relationship status etc;
- structure of explicit links to others.

A new user to a SNS aligns their personal information on the site and configures their own network. This can be directed by personal taste, such as music (e.g. MySpace), or a specified network (e.g. Facebook). The definitive SNSs include the 'Big Three', MySpace, Facebook and Bebo. There are numerous other sites, but these represent the most widely recognised in terms of user reach for middle class, and university based young people (Skinstad, 2008; boyd, 2006a; 2007), as well as their overall global ranking

65

(comScore Inc and TechCrunch, 2008)[27]. To provide a brief background to SNSs, we can take a closer look at the development of these three sites (see SNS timeline, figure 3.ii, page 88). SNSs have their roots in the United States and were led by the young people that were identified as belonging to the Generation Y 'cool kids' who were keen to make use of the 'cool' media (boyd, 2006a; boyd, 2007). MySpace launched in 2003 as a 'community' music sharing site and is built on the interactive element of music sharing that is based on the networks of nominated 'friends' that connect to one another (Beer, 2006; boyd, 2006a, 2006b). One of the main appeals of the site was that it was seen to have a cultural significance amongst groups of young adolescents where they could cultivate their own personal networks in a multitude of ways (boyd, 2006a). Whilst there have been concerns about the potential social isolation and withdrawal from society by young people (Kraut et al, 1998; Subrahmanyam and Lin, 2007) for the young users of SNSs, these are mostly seen to be part of constant and collective sociability that is sustained by connections to peers (Hardey, 2007; Livingstone, 2008).

Two years after MySpace, Bebo (Blog early, blog often) launched in the United States, with the international re-launch of the site in July 2005. In April 2005, Mark Zuckerberg put in place the Harvard based website, TheFacebook.com as a college-based network service for students to share and upload yearbook style content. By December 2006 all three SNSs had international access in Europe and the Asia-Pacific regions (see SNS timeline, figure 3.ii, page 88). What is important to note is that each site contains a niche user demographic based on what can be considered as a 'branded' set of network links (boyd, 2006a). For example, set up as an online music site, the MySpace network has been most popular with United States teenagers from lower income backgrounds who initially did not have access to alumni

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[27] *Social Site Ranking based on data calculations by Techcrunch from comscore.net 2008, [online] [accessed, August, 2008] http://www.techcrunch.com/2007/10/24/social-site-rankings/*

networks of Facebook (boyd, 2006a, 2007). In Europe, Bebo's most prevalent users have been college and school students in Ireland (Richmond, 2008). The Facebook network has had a history of gated access, which has been reflected in the sites progression and change of users. Originally the Harvard network, and Ivy League universities stratified the site. This later opened up to other United States high schools and colleges, then to other international Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) around the world, work places, and finally the 'open access' for 'anyone' from September 2006. Figure 3.iii shows the front page of the site as it appeared in 2005 for Harvard students.

Figure 3.iii Image of a screen shot from 'TheFacebook' 2005[28]
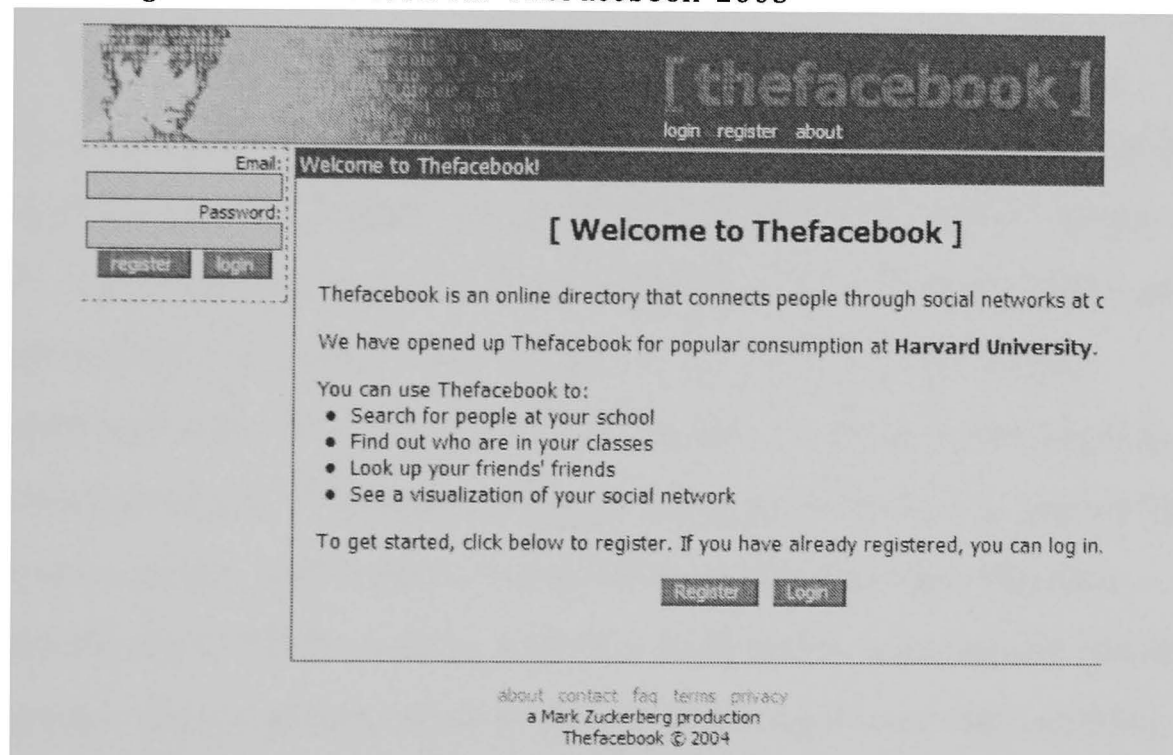
The trajectory of the 'Big Three' SNSs is important for contextual purposes and my later discussion about the use of social media by young people. By charting the progression of these sites, we can identify two distinct waves that relate to a specific social demographic uptake (boyd, 2006a). The first wave was from 2003 to mid 2006 to include the first year after launch of MySpace, Bebo and Facebook. The reason for this cut-off point is that it marks the period *before* Facebook became an open network like MySpace

[28] *Image source: Internet Archive Way Back Machine/Facebook 2005*

and Bebo. During the first wave MySpace dominated as the main network. The network had already been in place for over a year by the time Bebo and Facebook were launched, at the same time MySpace had a targeted brand image as a music share site, which made it immediately recognisable and had appeal with teenagers (boyd, 2006a). The second wave is after September 2006, when all three sites had international platforms and open access. Globally, this wave has been dominated by the growth of Facebook. Whilst it is not easy to source reliable statistics about these sites as they follow patterns of rapid growth and development, the latest figures show that Facebook is ranked as the largest SNS in the world, with 132 million total unique visitors[29]. The United Kingdom is the third largest country represented on Facebook with more than 7 million active users (Owyang; 2008). The popularity of SNS is reinforced by the latest figures from ComScore published in July, 2008 that shows overall the total SNS audience for the last 6 months (January to June 2008) grew by 64 million (12 per cent)[30]. As I have mentioned, reliable statistics about the use of SNSs are difficult to find and need to be approached with a degree of caution. Facebook and other SNSs are careful to include a note on their sites that the ownership of any user created content published on the site is passed onto those who control, and in effect 'own' the data. We can view this as a commodification of information, which is designed to successfully render the information that is generated by and shared amongst users into private, or 'owned' data that can exploited and otherwise capitalised upon. One example is from 2007, when Facebook began to use the data collected from accounts, profile information and actions across the site to target individuals with advertising. The Beacon advertising programme resulted in considerable controversy and changes to Facebooks policy; which is now displayed as an 'Integrated Solution' (see figure 3.iv, overleaf).

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[29] *Statistics from* http://www.insidefacebook.com/2008/07/27/intriguing-trends-in-social-networking-growth-during-1h-2008/
[30] http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press/

Figure 3.iv Image of Facebook's advertisement policy 2008

The point here is that Facebook's 'Integrated Solutions' indicates how users' information can be (and are being) used by the site[31]. What is unclear here are the boundaries between what constitutes personal and therefore private information on Facebook, against publically available data that is used by the site and can be published to third party users. The implication is that Facebook may use information from a Profile without identifying the individual to third parties. Facebook's justification is explained on their policy page, which includes the following:

> 'We do this for purposes such as aggregating how many people in a network like a band or movie and personalizing advertisements and promotions so that we can provide you Facebook. We believe this benefits you' [32]

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[31] *Please refer to The Guardian article, 'Facebook Principles',*
http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2008/jan/14/facebook/
[32] *http://www.facebook.com/policy.php*

In other words the commercial value of SNSs like Facebook is derived from the information and activities of the sites users. Therefore this is a user generated product, and led the Microsoft investment of $240m (£117m) in the site for a 1.6 per cent share in October 2007. A figure which suggests that the company was worth some $15bn (£7.3bn[33]). Significantly Facebook also states:

> 'Facebook may also collect information about you from other sources, such as newspapers, blogs, instant messaging services, and other users of the Facebook service through the operation of the service (eg, photo tags) in order to provide you with more useful information and a more personalised experience'[34]

In other words, for advertisers and others interested in targeting particular groups of users, SNSs like Facebook can provide 'high quality data' about the lifestyles, habits and consumption patterns of relatively young consumers who are likely to be following careers based on a university education. The targeting of this kind of data is seen as highly valuable for web-based business models(Story, 2007). As a result, SNSs are protective of information that is potentially commercially sensitive. One of the latest examples is the targeted advertising MyAd, on MySpace, designed as a 'HyperTargeting', which 'makes it possible to create ads geared toward specific audiences for placement on News Corp' (owned by MySpace) (Meisner, 2008). One example of this kind of targeting is,

> 'say a new indie band with influences from Pearl Jam and Soundgarden is planning the release of a new CD at a club in Seattle. MyAds would enable the band to create an ad targeting MySpace users whose personal pages include text or images of Pearl Jam or Soundgarden or the word 'grunge music"

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[33] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/7061398.stm/
[34] http://www.facebook.com/policy.php/

As I have already explained, it is difficult to obtain trustworthy and up-to-date data other than broad indications of the number of users. However, such information tends to be distributed by the marketing arms of SNSs as part of their strategies rather than handed to academic researchers. There is also a related industry that undertakes commercial research on behalf of companies that make public limited information about the surveys they undertake. For example, FaberNovel Consulting[35] released the figures reproduced overleaf as part of a presentation designed to promote the activities of the company.

Figure 3.v: Global growth of SNSs users above 15 years of age

SNS	June 06	June 07	% Change
MySpace	66,401	114,147	72
Facebook	14,083	52,167	270
Bedo	6,694	18,200	172[36]

The research in this thesis covers the period 2005 to 2008, and has captured the progression of Facebook from an alumni network for the 'privileged' at university, to a 'mainstream' social resource (Livingstone, 2008; Skinstad, 2008). This research should not be treated as *The Story of Facebook'*, although this provides an important backdrop. Indeed, such is the impact of the site that a film is currently in production about the development of the resources, written by Aaron Sorkin the writer of *The West Wing* and entitled, 'Facebook the Movie'[37]. Rather, the focus is the emergence of a new social sensibility that expands across other social networks and, as I go to argue later, all forms of social media. Facebook is an important character in this telling because, as I have charted above, the site represents the leading

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[35] http://www.fabernovel.com/news/research-paper-social-network-websites
[36] Sources ComScore MediaMartix survey reported in FaberNovel Consulting research paper 2007: Social Network Websites. Best practice from leading services. http://www.fabernovel.com/research-paper-social-network-websites/
[37] http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/aug/28/facebook.aaronsorkin

network and resource for young people, as the leading users of social media. Today, in 2008, the most recent research shows that the same group continue to dominate Facebook (Mayer and Puller, 2007; Skinstad, 2008). In 2007, in the United Kingdom 57 per cent of all visits to Facebook originated from university-registered accounts of users who were aged 18-24 years (comScore 2007). This pattern of user demographic is expected to persist on the site that,

> 'attracts a wealthier profile of visitor compared with MySpace and Bebo, with the MOSAIC[38] groups Symbols of Success, Suburban Comfort and Rural Isolation all over-indexed on Facebook relative to the online population'

(Hopkins, 2007).

The same pattern has been recognised in Australia where 'college students' continue to be distinguished as the main users of Facebook (Kidman, 2008). Indeed as Ray Valdes, Director of Gartner Research (a technology consultancy) notes, 'Years from now, no-longer-young, former college students will still be logging into their Facebook accounts' (cited by Kidman, 2008). For the initial university-based users, Facebook is inherently 'simple' to use and represents a 'one-stop resource' for other social media applications (Skinstad, 2008). In the following section I go into more detail about the functionality of the Facebook site. A degree of detail is necessary to acquaint the reader with the main features of the site and to explain how these have changed and been updated during the course of the research. I commence with the description of how I set up my Facebook account in

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[38] *MOSAIC, refers to the demographic classifications that are produced by the company Experian, and available from SPA Marketing Systems. MOSAIC has been used in Great Britain since the 2001 Census. Each classification is based on combination data sets including, census, electoral roll, housing and finance (86 variables in all) that stratify households into 12 lifestyle types, e.g. 'Symbols of Success', 'Suburban Comfort' and 'Rural Isolation'.*
http://www.spamarketing.co.uk/mosaic.htm.

October 2005. This was at the same time that the research participants also first had access to the site.

3.4 An informal guide to Facebook

In 2007, boyd and Ellison identified three main user features that were common to all SNSs, and repeat some of the characteristics that I have mentioned in the previous section. These focus on the construction, articulation and visibility of connections. These are summarised in more detail below:

> '(1) *construct* a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system,
> (2) *articulate* a list of other users with whom they share a connection,
> and (3) *view* and traverse their list of connections and those made by
> others within the system'

(boyd and Ellison, 2007).

What follows is a description of the main functionalities of Facebook. For the most part this is descriptive, and there is a degree of self-reflexivity as I lead into the description with a recounting of setting up my own user account back in October 2005. The rest of the Guide is from my own observations of using Facebook for over three years, with an outline of the main changes and updates to the site's layout, and functionality. The Guide is brought to an end in September 2008 when the site was updated as a 'new version'. This Guide is by no means exhaustive of all of the functionality of the site, instead detail is given to the main aspects of navigation, that hang on boyd and Ellison's (2007) model of construction, articulation and observation of network connections.

3.4i: Construction

Like other SNSs, *construction* is centred on the creation of a user Profile Page. On Facebook this is set up when a new user first registers with the site. Since 2005 the process of registration has stayed largely the same, and is similar to

the setting up of a new email account, when a user provides an account name and password.

Navigating to the site's Main Page (that will also be the 'Login Page' once a user is registered) the link 'Register' takes a new user to the main Registration Page. Figure 3.vi (overleaf) shows the Main Page as it appeared in October 2005.

Figure 3.vi Image of the Main Page/Login Page of Facebook in October 2005[39]
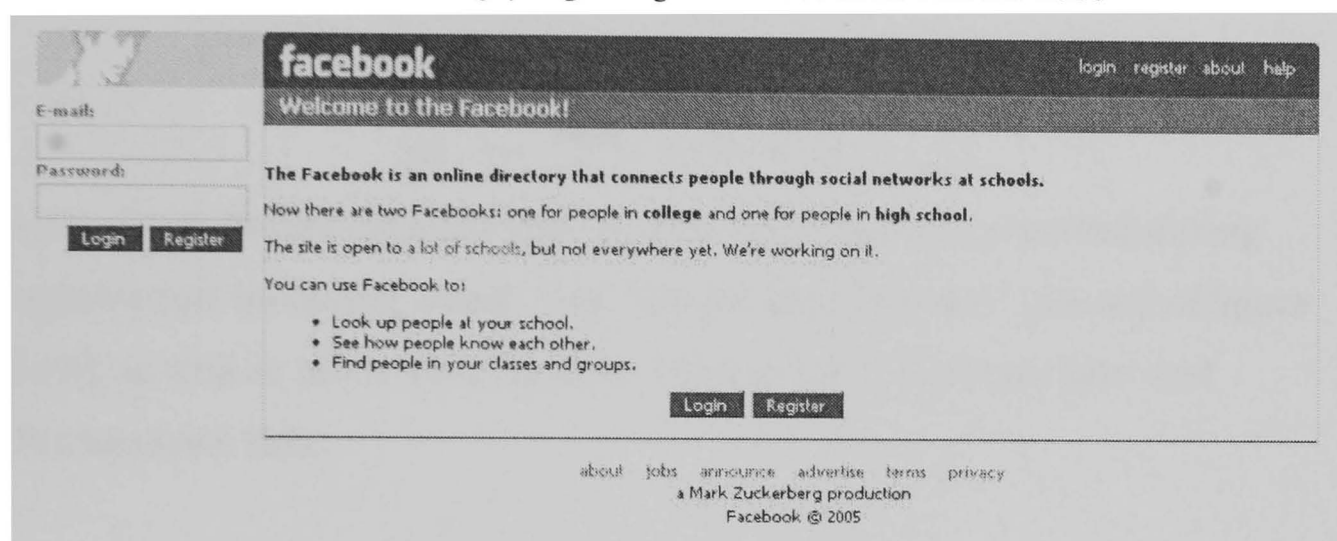
Following the email verification, sent to the university account, the user returns to Main Page to 'Login', to set up a security prompt (e.g. mother's maiden name) and to agree to the site's terms and conditions. After these procedures the user is ready to start to set up their Profile Page. Due to the personal content on a Profile Page this stands for one of the most important, and the most frequently accessed part of a SNS for users. Figure 3.vii (overleaf) shows the appearance of a typical Profile Page in 2005.

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[39] *Source: Internet Archive Way Back Machine, 'Facebook October 31st 2005'.*

Figure 3.vii Image of Facebook Profile page 2005[40]
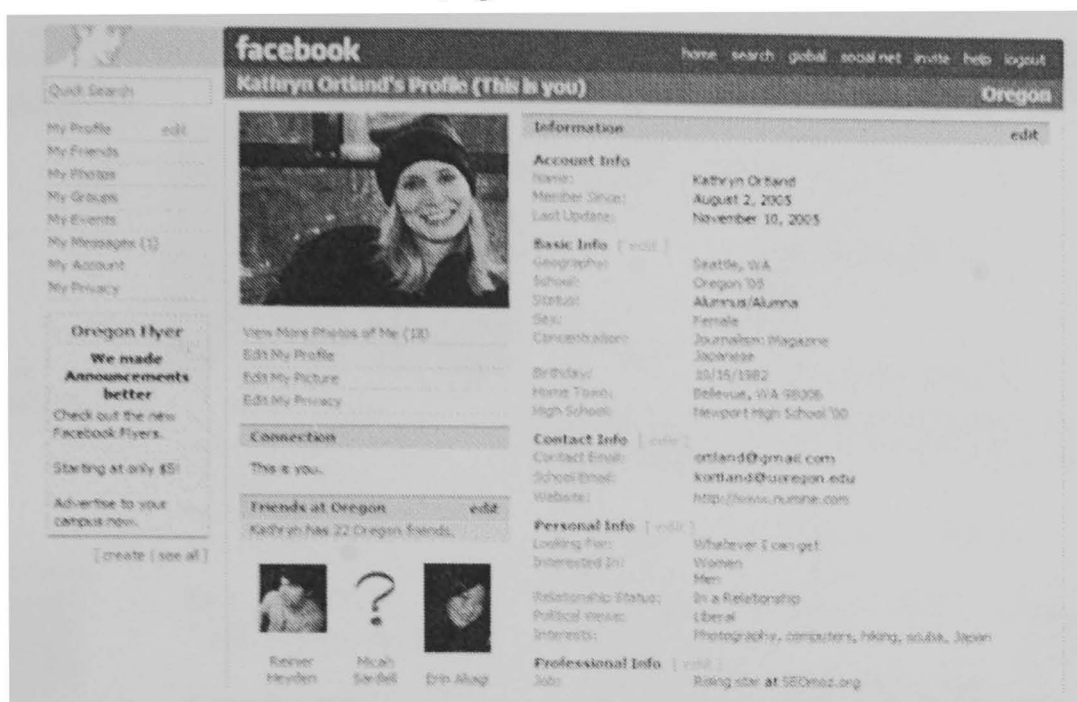
A Facebook Profile contains the 'Account Info' that was provided during registration, including 'name', 'sex' 'school' and 'birthday' (see top of figure 3.vii), as well as other 'Info', such as 'Contact Info', 'Personal Info' and 'Professional Info'.

Overleaf, is a screen shot from my own Profile Page (figure 3.viii, page 76), as it appears 'today', August 2008 on Facebook. The 'Info' snapshots are still an integral part of the Profile, but are located further down the page. These can be expanded or closed as a dropdown box by clicking on the arrow next to the heading of the box.

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[40] *Image reproduced from studix.tv*

Figure 3.viii Image of my Profile Page August 2008
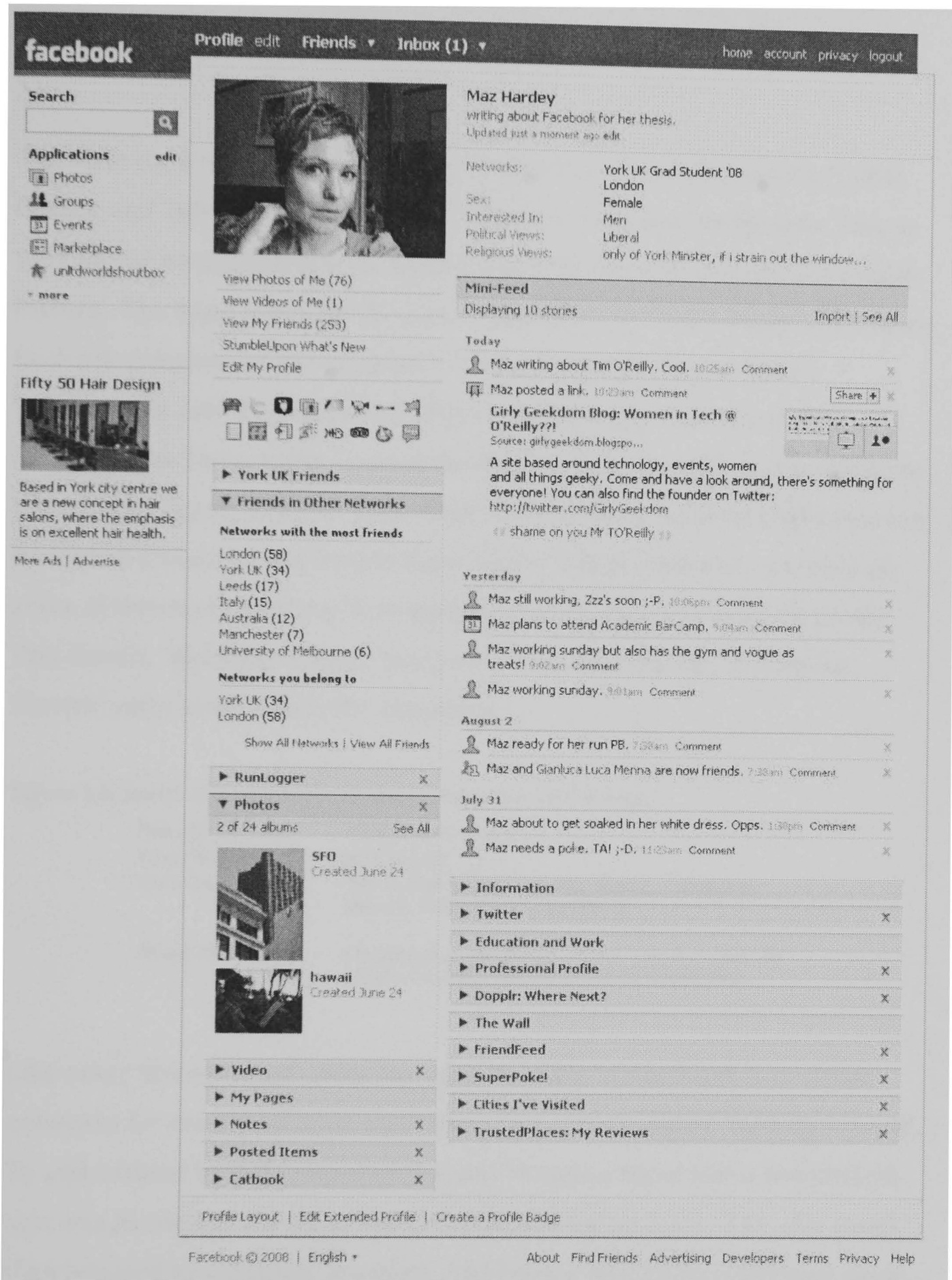
Comparing figures 3.vii and 3.viii, the main navigation, and uniform look and

feel of the Profile Page has stayed largely the same, with the equivalent

standardization of Account Information situated at the top of the page and placed next to the main picture.

The main *constructive* element to the Profile Page is the display of a Profile Picture and 'Info' boxes. The Profile Picture is uploaded via the 'edit' link on the top-line navigation bar. In 2005 it was only possible to store one Profile Picture. The basic information of users is generic to Profile Pages and a more in-depth summary of personal information is included in the boxes, 'Information' and 'Education and Work'. In 2005 these were included alongside the 'Information' part of the Profile Page, situated next to the main picture (see figure 3.vii), in 2008 these work as drag and drop boxes that can be moved around on the Profile Page. Figure 3.ix provides an overview of some of the contents of the 'Information' part of my own Facebook profile that details, 'Website', 'Email', 'Interests', 'Favourite Books', 'Favourite Movies' and a brief 'About Me' summary.

Figure 3.ix Image of Facebook Information from my Profile Page

Favorite Movies:	Breakfast at Tiffany's
Favorite Books:	with covers
Favorite Quotes:	"Let me tell you something, Mister. If I had her money, I'd be richer than she is.'
About Me:	I'm doing my doctorate. I don't care if it ruins my career. I'd rather be smart than a movie star.

Like other 'friend-based' SNSs, the main function of Facebook is to create networks for communication and interaction. This is called 'Adding Friends'. To add a friend in 2005 required the user to type a name into a search field that was located at the top left of the page (see figure 3.vii). The user could then proceed by manually selecting 'Add Friend' next to the displayed name. Today, Facebook automatically retrieves potential lists of friends that are already members of the site via users' email directories. This is now routinely generated during the registration process and can also be re-activated at other times. Friend additions can also be organised by 'Find

Current' or 'Past' 'University Classmates' that stratify searches by school, college, university and work place. Once accepted as a 'friend', users have access to each others Profile Pages and can send and receive messages and have access to other content on the site such as News and Mini Feeds and Status Updates.

Other ways to 'Add Friends' on Facebook is by joining and setting up groups. A Group Page shares the uniform look of a Profile Page with a main picture and Info box. These offer a generic 'description' and detail the Group 'type'. Figure 3.x is part of the Italian Girl Geek Dinner group. Users can choose to 'Join Group', 'Invite People to Join', 'Leave Group' and 'View Discussion Board'. The Discussion Board works in a similar way to a web-based Forum where Group members can post and respond to topics. Topics are displayed to other Group members who can then add their own response. Group member lists display the affiliated users in the same way as friend lists on a main Profile Page. Related groups are also shown on Group Pages. These provide a click-through to related content for example, the Italian Girl Geek Dinners Group has links to other groups, such as the 'Girl Geek Dinners Australia', 'Web 2.0 and Geeks' and the 'Facebook for Geeks' (see figure 3.x, overleaf).

Figure 3.x Image of the Italian Girl Geek Facebook Group Page

An important element to the Group Page is the access for Group members. For example, Group Pages can be arranged as 'public' so that they are viewable and open to any Facebook user. Other groups that are specified as 'Private' do not show up in searches and restrict membership either only to invited members, or those that belong to certain networks. For example, I can set up the 'The University of York Duck Group' and restrict access to only members of the University of York network.

3.4ii: Articulation

July 2007 marks the 're-launch' of Facebook when the site allowed third-party applications to integrate with user content. This meant that users had more control over the personalisation and inclusion of information and could add 'widget-like[41]' functions to their Profile Pages. This level of functionality mirrored the music video player on MySpace pages. On Facebook, these are called 'Applications' and occupy a separate box on the Profile Page. Each application may also have another icon below the Profile Picture. Applications are displayed as a drop-down menu (see figure 3.viii) that can be expanded on a page or compressed. Clicking on the application brings the user to the Application Page, where the user can add and/or interact with its functionality. For example, on my Profile Page the Application titled, 'Cities I've Visited' is a global map of countries that I have tagged as 'visited' or 'going to' with accompanying dates.

Figure 3.xi Image of TripAdvisor Application
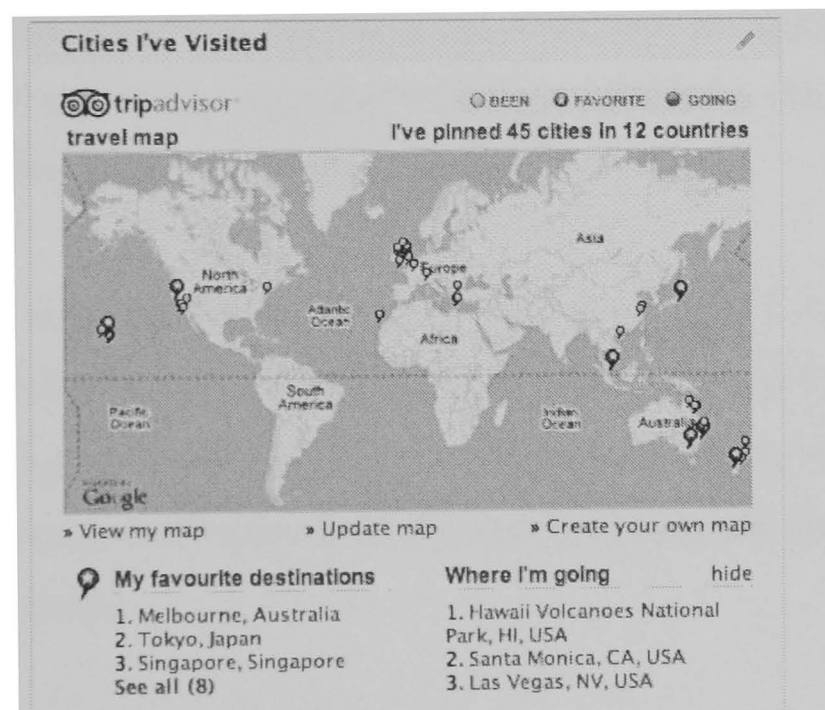
The Facebook Album Application is another popular addition to Profile Pages. The application allows users to be able to store and organise images

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41 *Widget: A component of a graphical interface or portable chunk of code that can be installed on any website.*

by titled photograph albums and personalised tags e.g. 'my holiday in Australia'.

Figure 3.xii Image of Photo Album Application on Facebook
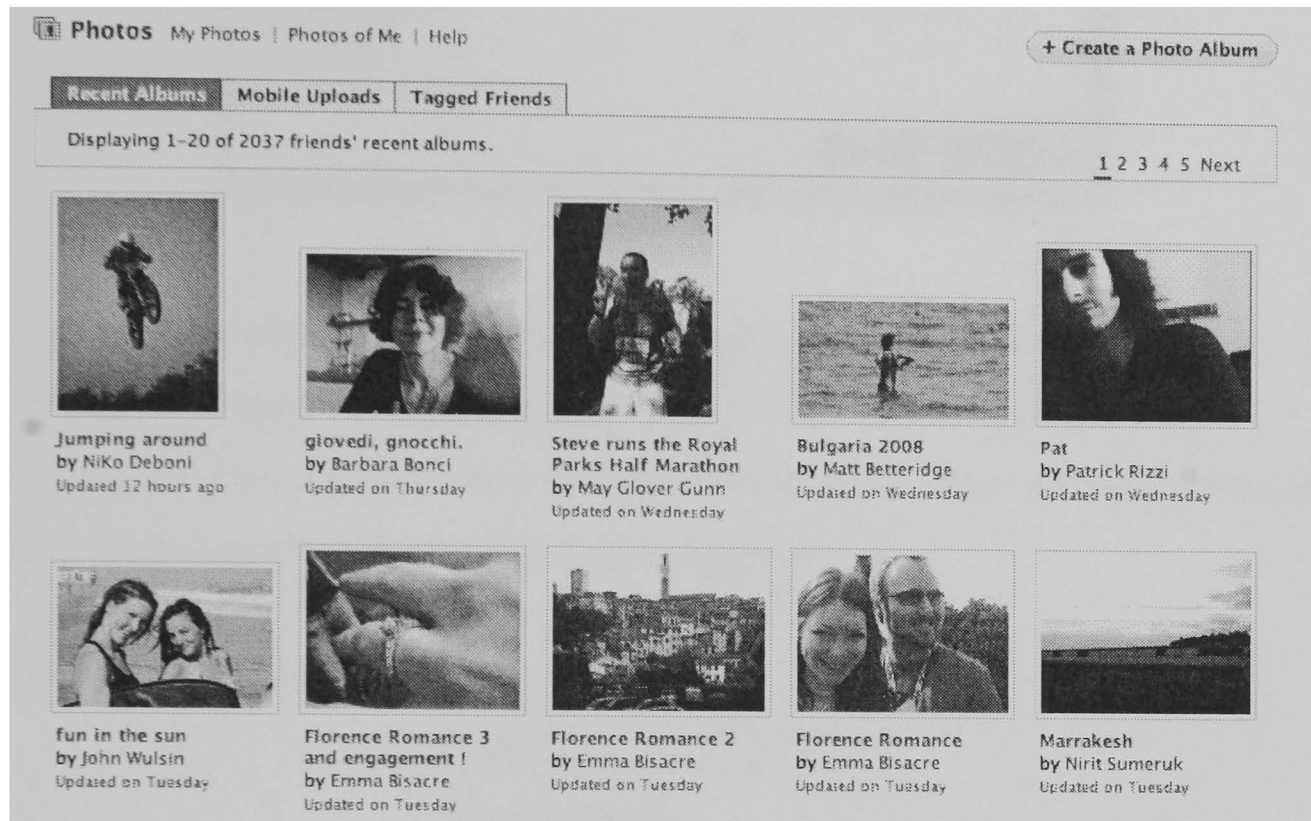
By using this application I can store a range of pictures in multiple albums. I can also change the privacy settings of individual albums, so they can be visible to or hidden from friends in my network.

A highly popular and 'fun' feature that has been in place on Facebook since I joined the site, is the articulation of what is in effect a virtual 'Poke'. This functions as an illusory 'poke', which is sent from one user to another. At the moment of 'Poking' a notification tells the user that they are about to 'Poke' (figure 3.xiii, overleaf).

Figure 3.xiii Image of Facebook Poke action
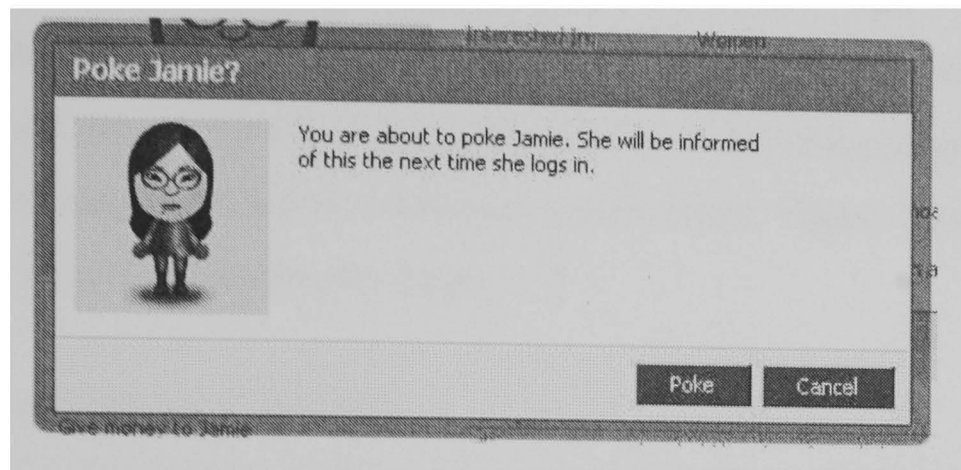
Pokes are only displayed to the user and sender, and each is alerted after they Login through the Main Page of the site. The Poke is completely content-less, containing no text or other information. After a Poke, users can opt to 'poke back' or 'delete' Pokes (see figure 3.xiv).

Figure 3.xiv Image of Facebook Poke notification

3.4iii: View

The final part of this informal *Facebook Guide* is about how users *view* and are aware of actions on the site. Privacy is important on Facebook, and is the main element that has changed during the course of the research. In 2005, a user Profile Page was open to *any* Facebook user in the same university network and/or who had been accepted as a friend. For example, at this time all of my Facebook friends had access to all of the content on my Profile Page. In 2008 the privacy settings have evolved into a sophisticated set of user preferences that can be tailored by network, and friend lists. In 2006 it was possible to place friends on a 'Limited Profile' list. This action gave more control to the user, who could select those friends that they wanted to view

82

and be able to interact with selected aspects of the Profile Page. For example, a highly visible and interactive element to the Profile Page is the Wall. The Wall acts like a cross between a discussion board and text message feature, where friends can post a short comment to each other. Figure 3.xv shows a typical Wall post from my Profile Page,

Figure 3.xv Image of Facebook Wall post
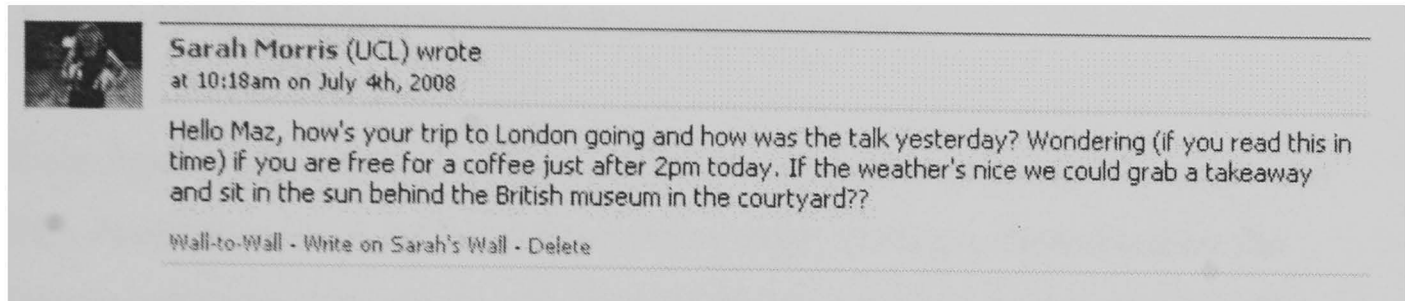
In the Privacy settings, the most common option for the Limited Profile list was to withdraw access to the Wall. This meant that only friends with unlimited access could view, make and respond to Wall posts. Facebook does not notify other users about Privacy settings and friends do not know if they had been placed on a Limited Profile setting.

In 2008 Privacy settings enable users to be able to select individual friends to stipulate specific access. In addition users can also select to be 'Hidden' from searches on Facebook and be deliberately concealed from other members. This option became particularly popular after September 2007, when Facebook launched a 'Public Listing Search', that allowed anyone to identify a Facebook member from a search carried out on the web, e.g. via Google. Figure 3.xvi, overleaf, shows the privacy settings as they stand in July 2008.

Figure 3.xvi Image of Facebook Privacy Settings Page, July 2008

🔒 Privacy

Profile ▸
Control who can see your profile and personal information.

Search ▸
Control who can search for you, and how you can be contacted.

News Feed and Mini-Feed ▸
Control what stories about you get published to your profile and to your friends' News Feeds.

Applications ▸
Control what information is available to applications you use on Facebook.
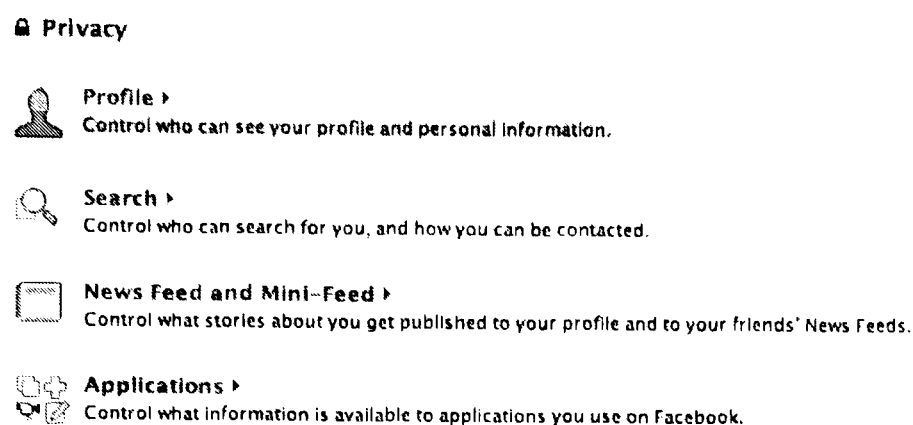
From figure 3.xvi we can see how other functionalities such as the News and Mini Feeds that were introduced in September 2006 are controlled by the Privacy settings. The News and Mini Feeds work by displaying the 'headline' information about a user's most recent activities. This can include information about Profile Page changes (e.g. 'Maz has updated her profile picture'), to reminders about upcoming birthdays, events and friend Status Updates. When it was first introduced, the NewsFeed displayed content on every user's 'homepage' regardless of Privacy Settings (at the time these were only very basic with 'Block User' and 'Limited Profile' preferences). When the NewsFeed was first put in place, there were complaints about the safeguard of privacy rights and the display of personal information that could have potentially damaging effects. This prompted a 'public apology' from Zuckerberg an extract from which is detailed below,

> An Open Letter from Mark Zuckerberg:
>
> Friday, September 8, 2006 at 10:48am
>
> We really messed this one up. When we launched News Feed and Mini-Feed we were trying to provide you with a stream of information about your social world. Instead, we did a bad job of explaining what the new features were and an even worse job of giving you control of them (...)
>
> Somehow we missed this point with News Feed and Mini-Feed and we didn't build in the proper privacy controls right away. This was a big mistake on our part, and I'm sorry for it. But apologizing isn't enough.

I wanted to make sure we did something about it, and quickly. So we have been coding non-stop for two days to get you better privacy controls. This new privacy page will allow you to choose which types of stories go into your Mini-Feed and your friends' News Feeds, and it also lists the type of actions Facebook will never let any other person know about. If you have more comments, please send them over.

(Zuckerberg 2006)

To return to the viewable elements of Facebook, one of the most recurrent updates in the News and Mini Feeds is the 'Status Update'. This feature works like a microblog or a meta-commentary that allows users to display 'what they are doing', in much the same way as the microblog site Twitter updates. Before November 2007, the feature was framed by the name of the user and word 'is', which meant updates read as, for example, 'Maz Hardey *is* surrendering sanity to Austen, Gaskell, Trollope, and Dickens'. After a popular Facebook Group-led campaign the site dropped the 'is' to allow users to set their own status. My status update (see figure 3.vii, situated at the top of the Profile Page directly under my name) is displayed as 'Maz Hardey: Writing about Facebook for her thesis'.

This informal Guide has covered some of the main features and functionality of Facebook. To re-cap, the principle pages on the site are the Main Page (Login), the Profile Page, and the NewsFeed Page. A large part of Facebook's success has been the addition of the Application Pages and updates to the Privacy settings. Overall the look and feel of Facebook, from 2005 to 2008, has remained fairly uniform with a light tonal blue theme to pages and navigation tabs located in the same place.

3.5 Conclusion

During the period of research there has been a convergence of the functionality of Facebook, and its user demographic (boyd, 2006a; 2007;

Skinstad, 2008). For example, the site has moved from only university alumni students to a more commercial profile with access to everyone. Rather than competing with other SNSs roles and functions, Facebook has allowed users to merge and share the content that they my have created on other sites. For example, users can display their favourite music from LastFM, pictures from Flickr and videos from YouTube on their Profile Page. Users can also set and re-set various software preferences without the exclusion of other SNS, content. These allow users to 'Share' items in much the same way the social bookmark site Digg works. As they come across content on the web this can be posted to their Profile Page and shows up in News and MiniFeeds. This level of functionality has made the site a recognised commercial source, with corporations joining networks (e.g. BBC), forming Groups (e.g. Vodafone) and advertisers posting content onto the site, and reveals the site to be a key 'hub' and portal to other social media resources. At the same time, Facebook has retained its original HEI users, and successfully expanded to include work place and regional networks. Whilst it has not been possible to cover the whole range of social software possibilities on Facebook (with the developer's platform these are limitless), the details of the main functionality give an impression of what it was like to set up a Profile Page, and what it feels like to begin to navigate some of the main features of the site between October 2005, to September 2008.

Themes that continue from Chapter Two are about the ownership and consumerism of media. In the forthcoming chapters which are based on the data collected for the thesis, I will suggest that SNSs have helped to establish a persistent *social presence* that extends across all social media. So far our discussion has highlighted the importance of the availability of resources and merging of social applications across more than one site. These social processes have been recorded during the course of the research, and continue to be of personal significance to young people's ever-expanding social networks. The rapid populating of SNSs and their continued

popularity amongst other members of the Generation Y demographic, demonstrate how such sites represent a natural social 'home' from home. It is therefore not surprising that SNSs, like Facebook, are the product of work by designers like the Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg, who as a member of the same youth demographic took advantage of the technical possibilities that were afforded by Web 2.0. Indeed, by building upon the social characteristics of Web 2.0 that include the social software, participation, collaboration and user generated content these have been reproduced in the form and use of SNSs. So far, the group that have been identified by this research are the most familiar with these social media, as they have shared every movement and moment of the resources since they were put in place. Therefore, far from being fleeting or only fashionable software SNSs, like email under Web 1.0, may have a sustained central place in people's social lives.

Figure 3.ii Timeline of SNSs

Timeline of SNSs 2003 - 2008

AUG '03 MySpace Launch

myspace.com
a place for friends

JAN '05 Bebo Launch

bebo

SECOND WAVE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING, AUG 2006 - AUG 2008

OCT '05 I join Facebook

20 JULY '07 Facebook Third Party Development Platform launched

2003   2004   2005   2006   2007   2008

26 SEPT '06 Facebook open to everyone

10 SEPT '08 New style Facebook site launched

APR '05 Official Facebook Launch

facebook

07 SEPT '06 Launch of NewsFeed.

08 SEPT '06 Letter of Apology from Zuckerberg

NOV '07 Facebook Public Profile Directory Listing

FIRST WAVE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING, AUG 2003 - AUG 2006

88

3.6 Crossing from Cyberspace

In the 1990s it was popular for the internet to be viewed as a 'cyberspace' that was hailed as a new social arena for 'disembodied' interactions. Such communications contained the allure of freedom from corporeal restraints such as gender, sexuality and age (e.g. Springer, 1991; Turkle, 1995). Twenty years on, this interpretation can be viewed as part of a social history of the web, with the view of cyberspace as both an 'experimental' and unfamiliar social territory not pre-fixed by the physicality or necessary requirements of identity (Slater, 1998).

Writing in 2009, the opportunity for such transcendence is more sophisticated and stylish than has been previously possible. For example, users on SecondLife can experience a whole 'metaverse' set within a 'virtual world' designed to simulate social identity and interactions. By contrast the focus for the participants in this research is the *essential* complement of the self to others in a way that elicits authentic authority about identity and communication. Significantly, the self is presented in a manner that is consistent with already-known associations and signifiers, rather than as an alternative, fantasy or idealised identity more congruent with interactions within the 1990s cyberspace.

The main argument in this thesis is that where the cultural imaginary of 'cyberbodies', 'cyborgs' and 'disembodiment' once dominated web interactions, it is unsuitable today for such virtuosity to stand in advance of what was previously separated as 'real world' associations. This indicates a new level of engagement with social media such as SNSs that is distinct from the building of virtual communities within cyberspace that had separate and distinct offline and online domains (Dvorak, 1996; Rheingold, 1993). A strong element to the research is how there is a convergence of such dualities so users are neither 'online' nor 'offline', nor classified as part of

'virtual' or 'real' worlds. This represents a more significant social and cultural shift in how identity and social connections with others are managed. Whilst technology has had a 'profound effect' on the way in which people come together and communicate (Dvorak, 1996: 4), how interactions are managed in accordance with prevailing social norms and values suggests a more complex set of social conditions.

It is, therefore, appropriate to turn to the work of Mead (1934) and Goffman (1963) to provide an evaluative framework for the formation of what I describe as the basic structure of social etiquette in response to social media interaction. The conditions of SNSs as already described in Part I of this chapter are designed to highlight strong synergy between already established identifiers (such as gender) and individuals *known* associations. For example, when setting up a Profile Page on Facebook, name, gender and network all represent essential, and are seen as 'basic', elements of identity for connecting to others. Mead (1934) notes the significance of interactions and aspects of the self that are guided by others. Goffman's (1963) 'performance' of identity also acknowledges the influence of audience and the role of the other in the expression of the self and interaction. In such synergistic replication of identity and connections it is appropriate to, in effect, leave the 'virtual' behind in the 'cultural imaginary' of computer-mediated communication best suited to the 1990s. Here I want to make the case that the 'virtual' should be regarded as that which is 'in authentic' and a 'poor imitation of the 'real'' (Holloway and Valentine 2003: 9) and is more suited to wholly online or game-based interactions. Indeed the advancement of 'cyberspace' was made popular in the Cyberpunk science fiction of authors such as William Gibson (1984; 1986; 1988) whose *construction* of utopia forms living inside cyber-worlds had parallels with the same creative abilities and play with identity that occurred online (Featherstone and Burrows, 1995; Plant, 1996; Stone 1992). In this way cyberspace created not

only new forms of identities and identifiers, but also new forms of social relationships,

> 'in which participants are no longer bound by the need to meet others face-to-face but rather can expand their social terrain by meeting others located around the globe on-line, mind-to-mind' (Holloway and Valentine, 2003: 10).

In the context of this research, my main critique of the scope of the commentaries based on cyberspace is how these give precedence to the construction of an offline 'reality' against the imaginative spaces of an online 'virtual'. In the representations and interactions of the participants in this study it is inappropriate for such experimentation, where it is seen to transcend the everyday, or to be removed from the mundane ordinariness of daily life. In Doel and Clarke (1999) terms such as 'hyper-realisation' point to the unreality of such social surroundings that can be continually 'detached' from the consequences and responsibilities of the 'real' world (Holloway and Valentine, 2003: 10). The importance that I identify here is how the participants own sense of self and others' social actions underlines the need to understand these accounts as a part of pre-established social norms and relationships that cannot be separated from 'reality'. As such in Chapter Five I focus on the role of Facebook in the formation of 'friend' connections and social signifiers that must match with familiar associations and actions in the formation of social networks.

Historically, technology, and in particular computing technology, has been viewed as 'second best' or dismissed as a poor imitation of the relationships and interactions already possessed with others in reality (e.g. Doel and Clarke, 1999; McLaughlin et al., 1995). Here we have two opposing social worlds that must be used, and have been researched, in different ways as constituted through their links and occupation of spaces. The focus on what could be considered as the small-scale interactions in this study exposes the synergy between the previous boundaries of the virtual and the real. Thus, in

this way, the intention is to suggest that such mediated lives are to be viewed in a different context, with certain styles of agency that befit the types of social media users, like the participants in this study, who choose to make *daily* use. Here there has been a relative lack of attention to the ways in which such users treat not only the technology, but their sense of self and relationships with others that are constituted always by the connections within a social network. As such, the rise of concern about how to interact, or dilemmas about how to respond to one another become everyday occurrences that reflect the set of cultural and social priorities of primarily young people as the heavier users of such technology. This has less to do with the capacity of the technology itself, and more about the way in which the self and, perhaps more significantly, how others perceive the self is managed by constantly updated streams of social information. In this respect both Mead (1934) and Goffman (1963) offer an understanding of the construction of the self, identity and interactions that are exposed by the intimacies exchanged between individuals. I want to suggest that the dimensions of identity that are displayed by the individual, as well as the continual assessment of mutual expectations that are modelled on forthcoming interactions, determine impression and social management of the self. On SNSs the individual is directly responsible for setting up a Profile Page and for posting and maintaining information.

Particularly suitable for the analysis in this study is Goffman's (1963) conception of the dramaturgy of interactions in terms of impression management. Rather than as a 'made-up' or 'fake' set of identifiers, the focus is on the use of traditional social categories such as gender in order to be seen to establish and/or adhere to the expected protocols for interaction. The interaction theory of Mead (1934) provides an emphasis on the notion of the 'other' as an influencing factor in behaviour and representation of the self across social media. In Chapters Six and Seven this involves the 'imagining' of the self from the perspective of others as a complement to the interplay of

interactions. Thus, it is argued that the shared expectations of social situation are vital to the mutual construction of social networks and interactions. For Mead (1934: 135) the self develops through constant contact with others, where interactions develop because of the connection to others. Mead (1934: 137) describes how the sense of self is created out of a sense of being fleeting, at once 'there', but always only momentary. These processes to describe the self suggest an inner dialogue with how the individual imagines they are perceived by others and is, as I will go on to suggest in Chapter Five, essential to the creation of a Profile Page on Facebook and the building of social networks.

Utilising the work of both Mead (1934) and Goffman (1963) it is possible to see how there is a socio-dramatic *play* of self and interactions. This hints at the flexible boundaries of cyberspace, but is crucially determined by prescribed rules for interactions that offer guidance for the building of networks of friends across SNSs. Though complementary to play-like and role-playing activities, the contexts of interactions managed across social media represent a constant adherence to the continual connection of the self with others. Under these terms the research reveals how the individual must always be both recognisable to and aware of the attention from – and/or the actions of – others. In the next chapter I explore the methodology that underpins the research, where I go into detail about the role of internet resources and the implementation of web-based services as a research archive (Maness, 2006).

- Chapter Four -
The Methodological Approach

Introduction

When I began this project my intention was to target those who were at the fore of media change and youth culture. The characteristics of this population had already begun to emerge around the popularity of the SNS MySpace (e.g. boyd, 2006a), as well as other attendant resources such as 3G mobile phones and iPods (e.g. Ito, Okabe, and Matsuda, 2005). At the time of the research, the commencing undergraduate university students were identified as being the 'early adopters' of Facebook (boyd, 2006a; Buffardi and Campbell, 2008; Skinstad, 2008). These were young, middle class individuals who shared the SMART characteristics I outlined in Chapter Two. In 2005, the initial gated access of Facebook, to only university students, coincided with the registration of the undergraduate students that I had already begun to observe. It was at this moment that I decided to share with the participants in this study the social and cultural opportunities, and challenges of social media, and to follow these for the duration of the research. Figure 4.i (page 123) shows a timeline of the data collection, which provides an initial overview of the progression of the research. The timeline also shows some of the other points of social media that I have made use of in my work. This is to highlight how the thesis has evolved from a focus on 'how' participants sought to shape their social networks, to address the consequences of the incorporation of social media into everyday social settings and convergence of social networks.

The characteristics of this group means that they share international links and can be identified in other consumer societies including Europe, the United States, Japan and Australia (Grinter et al, 2006; Livingstone, 2003; Livingstone, 2006; Tapscott, 1998). Literature about social connections via the internet has highlighted the significance of the global/local dimensions of

94

connections, and the emergence of different patterns in the utilisation of web-based tools in different cultural settings (e.g. Chang et al, 2003; Clarke, 2001; Ito, Okabe and Matsuda 2005; Wellman et al 2005). For this research, the rapid and ever-evolving dimensions of social media, together with limited empirical research, meant that it was important to situate the data as part of a transnational study with data from more than one location. As I have outlined in Chapter Two, the young people who share a history as the most technologically competent and proficient are not confined to the United Kingdom, but are an aspect of other consumer societies. In this regard, in response to the American 'bias' in terms of the context and critical knowledge about SNSs (e.g. boyd 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; 2007; boyd and Ellison 2007) means that including data from more than one country outside the United States was a valuable addition to the research. As a result the interview, focus group and observation data has been recorded from two separate fieldwork sites at the University of Melbourne in Australia, and the University of York in the United Kingdom. In total, 160 participants contributed to the interviews and focus groups, including the seven pilot interviews.

Figure 4.ii Tables showing the total number of participants included for the interviews and focus group data at the universities of Melbourne and York

Interviews	Male	Female	Total
Pilots (University of York)	4	3	7
University of York	29	25	54
University of Melbourne	16	26	42
Totals	49	54	**103**

Focus Groups	Male	Female	Total
University of York	12	15	27 (6 focus groups)
University of Melbourne	13	17	30 (6 focus groups)
Totals	25	32	**57**

The collection of data from Australia and the United Kingdom reflects my position of 'being in the right place at the right time'. A point Burgess (1984) makes where there is talk of 'luck' involved with good fieldwork. As a university student, I was ideally placed in both settings to penetrate the

social life of these young people, to be part of the same networks, and observe the behaviour practices as they emerged in different cultural settings. Moreover, the timing of the data collection (see figure 4.i timeline, page 118) at the University of Melbourne from October to December 2006, and the initial samples at the University of York from October to January 2006, allowed for data to be included from both the first and second wave of SNSs, as outlined in Chapter Three. To give a broad overview of the number of students who were at universities at the time of the data collection we can refer to the statistics below.

Figure 4.iii Full-time university education under-graduate student data for Australia and the United Kingdom

Nationality	Commencing Undergraduate Students		
	2005	2006	2007
AUS Domestic students	261,935	270,313	Statistics currently unavailable
AUS Overseas students	106,961	111,463	Statistics currently unavailable
AUS TOTAL	368,896	381,776[42]	Statistics currently unavailable
UK Domestic students	451,080	474,665	456,375
UK Overseas students	133,060	132, 480	143,685
UK TOTAL	584,140	607,145	600,060[43]

The young people that the research is about share a similar social background in terms of the ICT media available when they were growing up and access to resources at university. The main areas for divergence have

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[42] *Australia statistics from the, 'Australia Universities Full Year Student Data Report 2006'.*
[43] *United Kingdom statistics from HESA data archive. According to the 2004/05 – 2006/07 HESA student data, with thanks to Sheila Marland for her help in locating the right sets of statistics.*

been the setting up of mobile phone networks and the timing of some of the education policies. For example, since the 1980s in Australia there has also been a national agenda for ICT media opportunities in Government-funded schools. This was similar to the United Kingdom Government policy, where the provision of ICT was through recognition of the differential hardware and software resources as part of an education-led and school national agenda (Dowling, 2002; Hayes, 2007; Tebbutt, 1999; Worthington, 2002). Such policies meant that by the late 1990s in Australia computing access was at a 5:1 average ratio of students to computers at Government-funded schools (IEA2000, Report). In terms of the mobile phone industry, in Australia it was the national company, Telecom, that launched the first cellular network in 1987. Telecom continued to hold the monopoly on the Australian phone network until the mid 1990s, when in 1993 the company changed name to Telstra Mobile and launched the new 2G network in unison with the 2G network in the United Kingdom. In both Australia and the United Kingdom the analogue technology of the 1980s was eventually phased out through the 1990s and then replaced by the new Global System for Mobile communications (GSM) that helped to open up phone networks in both countries on a global scale. The mobile phone 3G service was launched the same year, 2003, in both the United Kingdom and Australia. 3G enabled operators more advanced services such as video calls, wireless voice telephony, broadband and wireless data and a greater global network capacity. A common perception is that technology has taken hold in much the same way, when a much closer look reveals that the social and cultural 'settings' represent important situations for knowledge and the rise in popularity of related media. These dimensions are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five, where I identify four stages in the rate of adoption of Facebook for first time users.

I have chosen to refer to the young people in this study as 'participants', as this term describes most appropriately their involvement during the data

collection. (cf. Holland, 2004; Reinharz, 1992). Those who have been mentioned in the analysis have been given a pseudonym to conceal their real identity. Other data that includes material from identifiable networks such as TrustedPlaces and the Girl Geek's have not been anonymised where permission was granted to publish the real name of the individual. All of the interview and focus-group data has been coded to correspond to a specific participant's data profile. The overview of the data profiles is recorded in the Appendix (from page 234), which shows the basic social demographic information for the interview data tables for Melbourne (page 234) and York (page 238) universities including, sex, resident college, degree subject, resident or international student status and types of social media used/owned. Other information in the Appendix includes an overview of the main data collected for the focus groups for Melbourne (page 244) and York (page 247) universities and the recruitment materials for the study including the outline of the interview and focus groups' topics (page 250) and the ethics form (page 255).

4.1 Using social media as a qualitative research method

The advantage of either a qualitative or quantitative method has classically been contested in the social sciences. Each has been used to demonstrate the symmetry between the epistemological position of the researcher and the techniques that are used during social research (e.g. participant observation, interviews etc.) (Bryman, 1984; Edwards, 1990; Doucet and Mauthner, 2002). In this way, to borrow from Howe and Eisenhart (1990), I follow the 'logics in use' of a qualitative research agenda that frames the style of the data collection and the type of records that are included in this study. One of the issues for the research context is that there is little published work about how to conduct data collection in what can be described as new 'field'

settings for the researcher[44]. In response to this I have *had* to turn to 'online', 'virtual', internet' and 'e-ethnographic' methodologies: For example, Miller and Slater's (2000) study of the internet in Trinidad, Paccagnella's (1997) exploration of the strategies for ethnographic research about virtual communities, Wilson's (2005) ethnography that explores the 'online' and offline' relationships within youth culture, and Mann and Stewart's (2000) examination of 'doing' research online.

As I outlined in the previous chapter, the main characteristics of social media relate to openness, transparency and participation. Hence this research agenda shares the same dynamics that include,

i.   Openness: The identification and inclusion of theoretical ideas that have emerged from the data, rather than 'squeezing' data into a predetermined theoretical frame, or selectively collecting data to fit a hypothesis. (cf. Strauss and Corbin, 1994)

ii.   Transparency: For the communication and details of the research exchanged with the participants.

iii. Participation: The recognition of my role as an ethnographer, which demands a flexible and reflective analytical approach.

The emergence of social media has been accompanied by a shift in the form of methodological approaches and the way that social scientists should interpret such 'new' styles of interaction (e.g. boyd, 2006a, 2007; Hookway, 2008). Previous research exploring Web 1.0 and 'cyberspace' has focused on what Silver (2000) locates as, 'cybercultural studies', which is focussed on *virtual* identities and communities that were only available on the web (e.g. Featherstone and Burrows, 1995; Rheingold, 1993; Spender, 1995; Turkle, 1995). The research conducted by Turkle (1995) was undertaken when the internet was viewed as a 'cyber*space*' and where there was room to 'play'

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[44] *For further discussion about some of the possible sociological implications of this kind of research, especially the possibility of the emergence of a new social research approach, see Hardey and Burrows (2008).*

with identity that was built on a 'disembodied' self. However, under Web 2.0, the social research possibilities and the consequences for academia remain relatively unexplored. Whilst much empirical work has been undertaken about the internet (e.g. Mann and Stewart, 2000; Miller and Slater, 2000; Hewson, 2003), relatively few studies have been focused on the social nature of Web 2.0 and consequences for doing research in this field (e.g. Beer and Burrows 2007; Gane and Beer, 2008; Hookway 2008). A limitation shaped by much of this research is that it is focused on how traditional research methods may be *transferred* to online, and web-based settings. As a result, it tends to be assumed the setting shares similar 'issues and difficulties, including ethical and legal' encountered when going out into the field (Hookway 2008: 92). However, social media provides new opportunities and challenges for the observation and collection of research data. As a result, it becomes harder to see how these fit within traditional research agendas.

Part of the challenge is to translate the appropriate methods that have proved previously successful into the new setting of social media. Whilst there are many guides to understanding the reach about the use and role of the web, these, as yet, contain little that is directly orientated to Web 2.0. Moreover, the most recent peer-reviewed publications tend to be focused on health and medical research (e.g. Giustini, 2006; Liamputtong, 2006) or about innovation for teaching and learning for libraries (e.g. Alexander, 2006; Maness, 2006; Miller, 2005). Furthermore, the openness, connected and always-available nature of social media pose new questions in terms of the ethics and privacy of participants. This is particularly problematical when methodological guides show only how to apply traditional research methods into other settings (such as online), rather than exploring the consequences of new styles of data collection and fieldwork. In this study such issues arose at different periods of the data collection, which included the stages of data gathering, processing, storage and for the analysis. In this

chapter I go on to explain how the research has strived to safeguard against all such methodological difficulties.

4.2 The insertion of 'I'

It should be evident from Chapter Two that I should include myself as sharing the same characteristics as the young people included in this study. As a result I include my own actions and encounters with others across social media as constituting what, in other settings would be an ethnography. In this context, it should be acknowledged that I have shared the same level of access, rights, knowledge and *timing* in use of the social media as the research participants. Another important source of data is represented by the inclusion of my personal blog, '*A Guide to Proper Facebook Etiquette*'[45] that I commenced writing in June 2007, an extract from which has already been included in the Introduction. The blog was initially intended as a playful strategy to write about the everyday dilemmas that arose using Facebook for the first time. The postings were not planned to be part of the study. However, the blog became an integral part of the reflections about social media that were raised by the research participants. In addition, it was also used by some of the participants as another way of communicating directly with me, where it was seen to be a part of the dynamic dialogue of the issues that had emerged from other data-gathering strategies. As a result, my role as an ethnographer has not been allowed to fade into the background and this became an important dimension to the research. My ethnographic role has been gradual and emergent during the three-year period of the study and had its beginning in October 2005, when I set up my Facebook account. With reference to the timeline, figure 4.i (page 118) moving from left to right there are other situations and occasions that I highlight as prime examples of the participatory practices of the research participants and of myself. The main instances include, the launch of my

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[45] http://properfacebooketiquette.blogspot.com/

personal website on Google Pages[46] in July 2006, my first personal blog[47] in October 2006, signing up to the microblog site Twitter in April 2007, the launch of the blog *'A Guide for Proper Facebook Etiquette'* in June 2007, my involvement with the Girl Geek Network[48] from August 2007, joining the user review network TrustedPlaces in October 2007 and my involvement with Channel4's 2Gether08[49] event in June 2008. This shows how the growing involvedness with various communities and other networks has emerged in an organic way and mirrored the additions of similar social media resources in the lives of the research participants. For example, the joining of other SNSs, and the accumulation of personal content across numerous social media (such as status updates on Twitter and Facebook) became an important element to the data. In addition, whilst the research can be viewed as a 'classic' participant observation, it was an inherent part of the data that I played an active and visible part in the networks I observed. To put it simply, it was therefore a necessary aspect of the study that I involved myself with others through social media and sought to share networks.

The openness and visibility of my own role as an ethnographer was intended to accentuate the different modes of interaction, where I could be everything from 'participant', to 'observer' (Olsson 2000). Liamputtong (2006: 4) cites Selwyn and Robson (1998) to explain how 'cyber research' has offered a 'democratisation' of data collection, 'more than orthodox research methodologies'. Liamputtong's (2006: 4) observation suggests that there is a

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[46] *http://mazphd.googlepages.com/mazhardey'swebsite*
[47] *This blog was of a personal journal style, and is now 'unpublished' and for private readers only.*
[48] *The first Girl Geek Dinner was on August 16th in 2005. The event was founded by self proclaimed 'Girl Geek' Sarah Blow who wanted to set up a non-profit community for women interested, involved and working in technology, http://londongirlgeekdinners.co.uk.*
[49] *This is an event to explore the effects of digital technologies with emphasis on the social benefits of new forms of social media. The event was sponsored and hosted by Channel4, as a 'Festival of ideas, popular technology and progress', http://2gether08.com/.*

new context for research interactions, which can take advantage of a 'non-coercive and anti-hierarchical dialogue'. This may be the case for purely 'online' data collection (e.g. Hookway 2008; Seymour, 2001), however the kinds of dialogue in this study have been complemented by in-person and 'face-to-face' modes of data collection. Thus, it should be noted that I have had an important part to play, not only in terms of the research design, but also its implementation. In this way I am at once, the 'researcher' and 'analyser' of the data, as well as an ethnographer. From this position I see a clear imperative value in the combined forces of data, both from the participants, as well as the incorporation and inclusion of my own experiences. These derive from a mixture of complementary data sources, which comprise the interviews, focus groups and participant observation.

4.3 Working toward an ethnography of social media

In order to gain insight into the different characteristics, attitudes, behaviour patterns and values of the research participants it was a *necessary* component of the research process that I shared the same resources and experienced for myself the same social situations. Olsson (2000) has argued that technology has altered the way that the ethnographer conducts research. He notes that when once the role of the researcher was to 'go out into the world and do ethnographical studies', this has now changed, so 'strange civilisations' are 'only a click away' (2000:1). Whether the participants in this study represent a 'strange civilisation' is open to debate, certainly in the eyes of other generations their behaviour may be described as 'unfamiliar', and viewed as part of a 'strange new world'. Olsson's (2000) point reflects the reformulation of social research in the light of new technologies and, for the research presented here, the context of what we can define as the research 'field' of social media.

At present there is no clear guide for undertaking research of this kind. Moreover, the academic setting of research has recently been met with new

challenges, such as, the need for instantaneous access and the openness of journal resources. In the United States, the American sociologist danah boyd declines to reproduce her work for publication with what she describes as the, 'archaic academic publishers', and she actively boycotts 'locked down journals' (2008)[50]. This means that boyd's work is often available in a web-based and 'read-only' format, without page numbers. In this mode the citation of specific articles must be followed by lengthy URLs, or footnoted to indicate to the reader where the item has come from. In addition, as I footnoted in the Introduction, the presentation of boyd's name must also be foreground to explain the lower-case spelling. For Beer and Burrows (2007) writing about what they propose as a, 'sociology of Web 2.0', such conflicts reflect the changing relations in the production and consumption of academic content. Ironically (and as the authors themselves note) by the time of reading, the paper describes what has already become the 'cultural mainstream' (Beer and Burrows, 2007), although their argument is still yet to penetrate the academic 'mainstream' and established research practices. Indeed, from a social science and academic standpoint, social media as a methodological resource still has a long way to go to infiltrate all areas of the scholastic setting.

Methodologically, the framework for this study shares much with Malterud's (2001) description of the 'exploration of meanings of social phenomena as experienced by individuals themselves' (2001: 483). To return to Olsson (2000), the necessary inclusion of myself as an ethnographer within the social media resources of the participants means that I have been 'able to see what is really going on in the setting'. Indeed, I argue that the development of Facebook is as a participatory social action, which should in-turn be

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[50] *More recently there is an additional note on danah boyd's website after the publication of her paper 'Facebook's Privacy Trainwreck: Exposure, Invasion, and Social Convergence' in the journal Convergence, where she states the article was '[forbidden from posting]'.*

viewed as a *collaborative* and *collective* field for the research. 'Collaborative' because of the nature of the social networks that have been built up, as well as the relationships that were cultivated with the participants. 'Collective', because one of the important dimensions of Facebook is that it provides a one-point access for social networks, and other social media. Indeed, as the technology has developed, my own Facebook profile has become a collective resource for other forms of social media, e.g. RSS[51] feeds from my blogs, updates from other SNSs, and content shares with Facebook friends. This has led to a mass accumulation of data, which needed to be sorted, classified, analysed and re-analysed, which I go on to explain later in this chapter.

4.4 The research ethics

So far, I have referred to social media as 'collaborative', 'open' and 'participatory'. Together with the openness of the research design and natural development of various networks, the embedding and inclusion of *real* identities is an important element to the data. It is a characteristic of social media that people are not, or do not always wish to be, anonymous in this type of social setting (boyd, 2007; Hookway, 2008; Livingstone, 2008). Whilst there are no clear directives about the 'ethics' of social media research, I have referred to the most recent *British Sociological Association (BSA) Code of Ethical Practice*, which was updated in March 2004[52]. Across social media, individuals can be viewed as vulnerable when they are unaware that they are being researched. For example, King's (1996) research about online communities had one respondent who withdrew from a mailing list, when s/he realised that the group was under study. For researchers, working in this kind of field it is difficult to know where to draw the line between the public and private, or to gain a measure of the level of intrusiveness, or how the research agenda may impact on the participants.

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[51] *RSS: Also known as 'Really Simple Syndication', this is a form of web feed used to publish frequently updated works – such as blog entries, news headlines, audio, and video.*
[52] *A PDF version of the Code of Ethical Practice is available online from* www.britsoc.co.uk/user_doc/Statement%20of%20Ethical%20Practice.pdf

Like other researchers, I have not included any material where the clear intention of the author was not to make public their identity (Hookway, 2008). For example, some bloggers carefully state their occupations, age and even a photograph on their blog. To follow the conventions of citing web-based material the urls have been noted and can be followed by the reader. In instances where resources such as blogs have been made anonymous, this decision has been respected.

To ensure that participants took part in the study voluntarily, and with the full knowledge that they could withdraw at any time, the ethics document outlined the research and the way that their contribution would be rendered anonymous (see Appendix A.6, page?). The participants retained a copy of the document and a further signed copy was kept for the research records. In the case of the interview and focus group data, participants were assured that the information they shared would be confidential to the project. When reproducing material from the interview and focus groups pseudonyms have been used to ensure that individuals are not identifiable. This is in line with the most recent BSA codes of ethical practice noted earlier.

The main thrust of the research agenda is that it is 'emergent' and has followed the 'natural' and organic development of social media as social connections that were initially on Facebook. There may have been a different set of protocols to follow had I decided to start researching Facebook *after* an established and personal friend network was in place. Instead, networks developed concurrent with the research, and it was in this context that I, 'Added as a Friend', all my Facebook contacts. In addition, information about the research is displayed on my 'Profile Page' for example; under 'Education and Work Info' I included 'Maz Hardey is doing her PhD about Facebook at the University of York'. Since July 2006 there has been a link to my personal research website and accompanying blogs from my Facebook Profile Page. However, it would be inappropriate to assume that

the inclusion of links and accompanying social information has meant that *all* of my Facebook connections have understood the breadth and the scope of the study, or wanted to be included. The inclusion of information on my Profile Page did not at any time stand in for the official standards of ethical practice for social research as stipulated by the British Sociological Association. At *all* times those involved with the research who were Facebook friends, or who later became Facebook friends have only been included with prior consent and knowledge of the principles and design of the research.

The BSA's 'Code of Ethical Practice' reminds us that the, 'research participants should understand how far they will be afforded anonymity and confidentiality and should be able to reject the use of data gathering devices' (BSA, 1989, 2004:704). The same code of ethics continues by emphasising the importance of respecting the anonymity and privacy of the participants, and this has been adhered to in this study. A variety of methodological texts address anonymity, and the norm is to emphasise the importance of maintaining this identity (e.g. Bryman, 2008; Gilbert, 1995; Gliner and Morgan, 2000). Thus the usual 'rule of thumb', to follow Barnes (1979:39), is that the data should be presented in such a way that individuals are able to recognise themselves, whilst the reader should not be able to identify a respondent.

In purely web-based environments the researcher may be cast in a similar role as those who study newsgroups and forums, who have been seen as 'lurkers' or 'voyeurs' (e.g. Fiore et al, 2002; Roberts, 1998). Away from Web 1.0, my role has been different and as a result of being an active participant of social encounters and interactions. On newsgroups the level of engagement has had its own problems, as Eysenback and Till (2001: 1104) note where,

'The researcher isn't familiar with newsgroup culture (...) they try to interpret behaviour of cultures they really don't understand (...) (and) it caused a rippling sense of resentment and betrayal among those who find such things underhanded'.

In the case of participant observation it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that individuals have an awareness of their role and contribution to the data (Liamputtong, 2006). For this research, when the line has not been clear-cut - for example the inclusion of a Wall Post, or message from a Facebook friend - the sender was contacted directly, and consent obtained. In the ideal set of circumstances, all the research participants would have granted informed consent prior to the start of the research. However, the emergent progression of the project meant that this was not always possible. As personal networks grew, determining when to ask for informed consent was driven by the context of the connection, and the potential involvement of the subject within the study. For example, a Friend Request and Wall Post from an, 'old friend' has been included in the analysis. Consent for the inclusion of this data could only have been obtained *after* the friend had contacted me. In consequence, whilst the particulars about ethical consent have remained consistent, the timing and adjustment of when to act has shifted during the course of the study.

The ethical responsibility of the researcher is for the protection of privacy and personal identity of those involved. This has increased importance when given a research context in which the data relates back to the 'real' person. In her study of web-based resources about breast cancer, Pitts (2004: 40) concedes that she 'can make no claims about the off-line identities of the authors (...) and I do not assume that cybersubjects' online identities are necessarily identical to their offline identities'. In previous social research that explores web-based social relations there is opportunity for divergence between the online and offline identity of individuals. In the case of Facebook and social media it is more difficult (although not impossible) for

individuals to have created a 'false' or misleading identity. Moreover, for those in this study, there was little appeal or desire to create such fake or deliberately deceptive identities.

Every attempt has been made to ensure that the participants have full notification about the study, have given their consent to take part and ensured the confidentiality of the reproduced material. I have chosen to include extracts and descriptions that are from and are about individuals in my network. To return to King's (1996) analysis of internet communities, he recommends that *all* references to the individual should be removed, as well as the location and type of form studied. Social media has opened up the web-based 'venues' for research, which have converged the 'old style' newsgroups, forums, as well as the 'cyber-culture' and 'communities' that King (1996) and Pitts (2004) make reference to. Here, SNSs can contain elements of all these media. In addition research about SNSs, which are inherently personal and personalised, raises potential conflicts about the protection of the users who may not know they are under observation. At this point the debate slides from a focus on ethical frameworks, to having a hold on the additional issues and considerations of the appropriateness of conducting web-based research in these new settings. The approach in this study has been to be as open and as visible as possible, both in the formation of networks and as an ethnographer. At all times during the research data collection it has been a priority to act within the guidelines for ethical and responsible research practice. This was in order to protect the privacy of the participants as well as myself.

4.5 The sampling strategy

Starting from December 2005 to February 2006 I carried out Piloted interviews at the University of York. At this time I followed a snowball sampling strategy that enabled the sample population to be built on the active networks of participants. Browne's (2005) use of social networks to

research non-heterosexual women followed a similar strategy, where a snowball recruitment method allowed for access into her population. If, like Browne (2005), we begin with the 'premise that research is *'formed"*, the snowball procedure and use of social networks describes the way that as researchers we actively *"make'* research' (2005: 47, emphasis added). In this context, the sampling process serves to emphasise the interpersonal relations that *already* exist between individuals and which this research is about. Adler's (in Lamberet, 1990) ethnographic investigation of 'hidden populations' highlights how this is a method that is usually associated with the 'disadvantaged', or 'hard to reach' individuals. Rather than being a 'deviant' or 'hidden population', the young people included in this study represent a population that has (and has had) a privileged access to social media resources. The snowball sampling procedure has allowed for the interpersonal relations that already exist, and are crucial to daily interaction, to become visible (e.g. Browne 2005; Kwait et al, 2001). Using snowball sampling, endorsed the recruitment of the research participant's friends who wanted to take part in the focus group and interviews. Consequently, the use of this technique resulted in the disclosure of networks and also laid emphasis on the 'participants' accounts of their lives' (Browne 2005: 47).

The snowball sampling at The University of York proved an effective method to gain entry, and to establish a rapport with participants who I found to be keen to nominate and volunteer other friends to contribute to the research. The success of this approach allowed me to follow the same method in Australia, where I relied on the introduction to participants' friends for my sample. As a point of entry to potential research participants, this relied on a combination of approaches that included 'hanging out' and using the same facilities as the SMART group e.g. the university library, campus cafes, common rooms etc. and striking up conversations with students in these locations. Another approach was the introduction to students who were interested in the research from members of the university faculty staff. To

illustrate this point, overleaf is a short anecdote, which describes my arrival at the University of Melbourne and introduction to one of the research participants, Carter[53].

'I'll Facebook you'

I met Carter in October 2006 when I arrived from the University of York in the United Kingdom to do research for my PhD thesis at Ormond College, Melbourne University in Australia. A cricket match was being played on the college lawn and a BBQ was just starting beneath a broad Eucalyptus. This was the start of a twelve-week research residency at the college where I would be talking with the university undergraduates about their social networks. As I passed the gathered students, wheeling my suitcase, I began to speculate the best course of action to begin to gain access to the student's networks. It was then, across from the BBQ revellers, that I bumped, quite literally, into Carter. This is a moment that began as a seemingly conventional introduction to a new friend and led to a series of social network links that have demanded my attention for over three years.

Born and raised in New Zealand, Carter had been at Ormond College for only a matter of months and had just commenced a course on 'Economics and Third World Development'. On our first meeting he immediately extended an invitation for me to join the BBQ scene in the college quad, crowded with students taking advantage of the dipping evening sun. As I surveyed the lively social scene, I remarked how quickly everyone had gathered together. Quick, even with the prospect of free beer and burgers.
'That's Facebook for you' Carter revealed.
'Facebook, yes we have that in the UK too' I replied.
'Well you'll find it's the way of the College life here! If you don't make it out to the Quad tonight, I'll Facebook you' Carter promised.

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[53] *Pseudonyms have been used to protect the privacy of the participants and to refer to them in the analysis*

As described in the above anecdote, the main strategy was to develop links with the potential participants as organically as possible. The pilots gave way to snowball sampling, interviews and focus group data. The snowball method reflected the points of contact that the participants naturally forged for themselves, as recursive and networked chains of associations. In this context, it was also important that the interviews and focus groups were carried out in a range of informal settings, where the participants could feel 'at ease'. These included the university campuses, student study areas, coffee bars, student residences, and bars. This complemented the research design and agenda, and allowed for a replication of the networks of the participants where I would be introduced to other friends in such locations. When a meeting was being arranged, this was at the time and location chosen by the individual. I endeavoured to stay as open and flexible as possible for potential meet ups, which led one focus group to take place during the Live Aid concert at Melbourne Bowl, in Australia. This strategy was important as it allowed for ongoing access to potential participants and to cultivate contacts that I made through more casual introductions. Meetings varied in length, and were always based on the preferences of the participant(s). The shortest interviews were less than ten minutes, with the longest over 180 minutes, and the focus groups between 35 and 110 minutes in length.

The data collection followed three main stages that matched the time trajectory of the research (see figure 4.i timeline, page 118).

- Stage one: Pilots, with emphasis on the initial interview and focus group data with an initial observation of Facebook in the United Kingdom.
- Stage two: interview and focus group data, with continued observation of the Facebook network when in Australia.
- Stage three: data emphasis has shifted to the immersed and participant observation of Facebook that includes other social media.

The series of research strategies adopted could be criticised for not providing a representative and quantifiable sample population. However, the rapidly evolving nature of social media means that it was not possible to identify a population from which to draw such a representative sample. Moreover, the strategy followed was to ensure a salient means for entry into the participant's social networks and to cultivate a sampling dynamic that would be ongoing throughout the research. In this regard the sample style can be seen as recursive and as 'ever-evolving' in line with the dynamics of the social networks. This is important, as it meant there was opportunity to continually update and to modify the emphasis of the research design. Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe how their notion of 'grounded theory' is cultivated through a similar set of dynamics, where there is continual collection and analysis of the data, until a 'theoretical saturation'. By using a variety of methods and sample strategies it is possible to develop a robust knowledge about the data, which then informs the later strategies of data collection and analysis.

4.6 The interactional role of interviews

The use of a semi-structured interview schedule allowed for issues and topics to emerge during data collection, which could then be pursued during the interview. Pilot interviews were undertaken in order to develop the interview schedule, which included both closed and open questions to cover demographic information such as 'age', 'college or place of residence' and 'subject of study' as well as the broader topics about social media use (see Appendix A.5, page?). The pilots have been included as data for the study. As Bryman (2008) has explained pilots give scope to be able to develop further questions in response to significant replies, and to explore other topics that may not have been a part of the original interview agenda. The pilot interviews were crucial to the development of the final flow of the interview schedule and construction of the closed questions for the close of the interviews. During this process, it was decided that the closed questions

should be placed at the end of the interview where they would help to draw to a close the discussion. My initial concern was that this may hinder the rapport with participants, however most preferred such 'fact-based' and classificatory information at the close. Moreover, as May (2001) points out these types of question can be off-putting as an opener, without scope to be able to reflect on the responses in the context of the research questions. At the end of the interview there was also an opportunity to clarify why such information was useful to the study. I found that this process allowed individuals to feel more at ease and comfortable within the interview setting, and for my own ideas not to dominate the proceedings (Kvale, 2006). In addition this approach also created a moment that encouraged individuals to suggest friends to be included in the study.

Following the seven pilot interviews I refined the interview schedule in light of the suggestions and amendments of the discussions. For a detailed breakdown of the final interview schedule please refer to Appendix A.5. To summarise, the interview was broken down into four parts. Part one, was the introduction to the research which included signing of the consent form. Part two covered the types of social media that the participant used, and explored the role of the technology in the university setting. Part three, dealt with the management of relationships, which included the use of social media by friends and family, the new demands on sociability and new types of etiquette. The final part of the interview schedule included the social demographic information, and any other issues that the participant wanted to draw out.

To document the data, interviews were recorded using an iPod player with a Belkin voice recorder that allowed for a higher recording quality than cassette tape, and meant that files could be compressed directly and uploaded to my personal laptop. During the final part of the interview the recording equipment was left to run, in order to secure as much detail from

the participants and to capture any other data that might not have come up during the main discussion. The transcription of files was completed as close to the end of the interview recordings as possible. I found this allowed me to retain knowledge about a specific individual after data collection and to follow-up any potential sample leads. This strategy also ensured that the data remained in its 'rawest' and 'truest' form, rather than the risk of being overly influenced by my own post-analysis or theoretical prejudices (Bryman, 2008).

Fowler (1988) has drawn attention to the 'interactional role' of the researcher and interviewee. During each interview, the variations in dialogue and flow of the exchange allowed for the following up and expansion of interesting issues. Manderson, Bennett and Andajani-Sutjahjo (2006: 1317) have referred to such interview dynamics as 'performative factors', which 'all influence the direction, flow, and content' of structure and the recorded accounts of social life. Rubin and Rubin (2005) describe this dynamic as a 'responsive interview' that is more conversational in style and has the advantage of being focused on the research participant's answers. Interview data has been criticised for reproducing only 'artificial dialogue', where questions only elicit answers that are modelled round a specific agenda (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001). In this study, care has been taken to avoid the over-restrictiveness of the interview schedule, or the 'intrusion' of my own judgments. Here, the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee can be imbalanced or open up a hierarchical dialogue, where the participant is not the main subject of the proceedings. Alvaraez and Urla (2002) cite Polkinghorne who explains this potential risk in detail as, 'people strive to organise their (...) experience into meaningful wholes and to use the narrative form as a pattern for uniting the events of their lives' (Polkinghorne, 2002: 40). Hence the interview process represents a critical dynamic between the researcher and participant, where both can seek to control the data. In this way the effect of the interview interaction is a two-

way process, where the interviewer and interviewee together form a collective narrative. Other researchers have echoed the dilemmas about this kind of procedure and most notably Oakley (1981) has considered the role of the feminist researcher, when she was met with direct questions during her non-structured interviews with women. One of the research issues that arose during this data collection was the appropriate distance of my own role from the discussions. For example, the interviews became an occasion for participants to directly ask, or look for understanding from me to back up their assertions. A reoccurring question was, 'Do you feel the same?' by the participants. For the sake of clarity, and in keeping with the 'open' approach of the research, I found that it was beneficial to respond in kind to these promptings and to allow the interviewee to shape the proceedings. This helped to open up the interviews where shared dilemmas with the participants allowed for access to new meaning and issues. At moments when the discussion appeared to be going off-topic, the strategy was to refer back to the interview schedule and to guide the conversation back to the main agenda.

4.7 Building on the group dynamics of focus groups

The interviews yielded a rich source of data, and when it was found early on that participants were keen to nominate friends, the suggestion from my initial piloted sample was that these 'interviews' take place as 'focus groups'. The focus group method can be thought of as a form of 'group interview' where there are several people contributing (e.g. Bogardus, 1926; Edmiston, 1944; Higenbotham and Cox, 1979). I conducted a total of 12 focus groups, with six in the United Kingdom and the same number in Australia,

Figure 4.iv Table showing the number of participants included in the focus group data at the universities of York and Melbourne.

Focus Groups	Male	Female	Totals
University of York			
Group 1	2	3	5
Group 2	2	1	3
Group 3	1	4	5
Group 4	0	3	3
Group 5	4	1	5
Group 6	3	3	6
Totals	12	15	Total York: 27
University of Melbourne			
Group 1	4	0	4
Group 2	0	3	3
Group 3	2	3	5
Group 4	2	4	6
Group 5	3	3	6
Group 6	2	4	6
Totals	13	17	Total Melbourne: 30
			Total: 57

The openness of the interview schedule meant that little variation was needed from the design of the agenda, and this retained the same four-part structure that was described earlier. During the focus groups, I found that my role as a co-participant in the proceedings was further distanced than it had been for the interviews. In effect I could 'take a step back' and fade into the background and that this was advantageous to the vibrancy of the group (e.g. Goebert and Rosenthal, 2002). Wilkinson's (1998) work on the power dynamics of focus groups draws attention to the possibility for individuals to 'take over' or to 'dominate' sessions. This was not the case in the twelve focus groups that were carried out, where participants were already friends which gave an informal and relaxed form to the discussions. Another point of view is that there is a risk of 'over-moderation' that could impinge on or miss out other issues from the discussion (Bryman, 2008; Krueger, and Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1997). For my focus groups, the emphasis was on the participant's social conventions and friendship dynamics, in this setting individuals mentioned that they found it 'easy' to find commonalities and to share dilemmas. The level of 'moderator involvement' has been an issue for

other researchers for example, Gaiser (1997) and Fox et al (2007) who conducted *online* focus groups with their participants. Running focus groups online, or 'virtual groups' was within the resources of this study, however, I viewed this as an inappropriate method to capture the nuanced and subtle modes of interaction between individuals in the groups (Stewart, et al 2007). This strategy also did not have appeal with the individuals in this study who were keen to respond in-person and also to share the experience with their friends (Denzin, and Lincoln, 2003). This may reflect the use of social media networks that were seen as 'fun' or 'cool' tools to *support* friend 'networks', rather than for purposeful 'networking' or more practical use (boyd 2006; boyd and Ellison, 2007).

One criticism that may arise is, that as the focus groups involved participants that were already 'friends', there was little opportunity for issues to be raised that would come up between individuals who were in effect 'strangers' (Morgan 1998). Equally, by using groups that usually interact this might hinder the disclosure of certain topics (Krueger and Casey, 2000). However, I found that it was advantageous to replicate friend dynamics within the group. On reflection, it is also possible to see how the friendships between individuals were central to the interaction and opening of discussions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). A further benefit of coming together as a group was that this was effective in contributing to the snowball sampling. Individuals took the opportunity to introduce me to other friends, either in-person during the session, or after, through a friend invitation on Facebook.

As with the interviews, focus group sessions were recorded for transcription and the same research consent form was signed. Compared to the interviews, the focus group sessions took a longer time to transcribe. I made a point of not conducting focus group sessions that had more than six participants, so as to give opportunities for everyone to contribute and to be able to manage the sessions effectively. This also allowed for emphasis on

the accumulation of 'in-depth' and extended topics, rather than 'numerous brief suggestions' (Morgan, 1998: 75).

4.8 The analysis and accumulation of the data

From the initial pilot interviews and observations of Facebook in 2005, to the immersed and 'preoccupied' attention of social networks in 2008, my aim was to stay as true as possible to the 'flexible, evolutionary, and recursive nature' of the data (Lindlof, 1995: 131). As a result, the analysis was continuous and ongoing throughout the research process. The transcription of the data represented only one part of the process, which was the conversion of voice data to text. Other sources are included such as blog posts, social media actions (e.g. a Facebook Wall post or message) as well as introductions, meetings and events. All of these sources of data were converted to text and saved as Word files for retrieval and classification.

For the interview and focus group transcriptions I chose to use the qualitative software package ATLAS/ti. The package works by allowing the user to create a 'project' or 'idea container', which encloses all the data. This allows for the data to be coded by themes and structured showing links between the original source materials. ATLAS/ti is particularly useful for identifying useful quotes from long transcriptions of dialogue. In addition sections of text that are coded as 'significant' could be captured under the same headings. ATLAS/ti was used as an index and retrieval tool to facilitate the systematic approach to data analysis. All material was read and then re-read, and I allowed nuanced classifications to emerge from the data (cf. Silverman, 2001). In addition to ATLAS/ti, I found that the range of graphical tools for visualising network links that was available on Facebook and other social media (e.g. Social Graph Application for the display of shared friends) provided an 'easy to use' and 'at hand' tool for data analysis.

The analysis was ongoing, and the transcription and organisation of the initial interviews and focus groups, informed and directed other sources of data as the study progressed. There is a degree of reflexivity in this process, for example, the coding of data for analysis is reliant upon the retrieval and documentation of the material (Ryan and Golden, 2006). This aspect of the research process is interpretative and lies at the heart of the ethnographic observations. In terms of qualitative data, there can be a risk of 'fragmenting' and 'de-contextualising' material during the 'sense-making process' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000: 35). As Mauthner and Doucet (2003) have pointed out, whilst the importance of 'being reflexive' has been acknowledged within the social sciences, 'the difficulties, practicalities and methods of doing it are rarely addressed' (2003: 413). Thus, the consequence for current research led by a reflexive, constructive and expressive approach remains an area of contention. Indeed, as Mauthner and Doucet (2003) assert, the degree of 'emotional' and 'interpersonal' influences means that data analysis is far from a 'neutral' methodological process. During the analysis, data is 'imbued with, theoretical, epistemological and ontological assumptions - including conceptions of subjects and subjectivities' (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003: 413). To follow this observation, I lead with the participant's comprehension of her or his own subjectivity. Thus, in one sense, the data represents the 'stories' of the participants, as part of a 'situated knowledge', embedded within a specific social, cultural and historic moment (Haraway, 1988). Indeed, as Denzin and Lincoln (1994) have expressed, we are a necessary component of the social world that we choose to study. From this perspective, in terms of the analysis, the participant's 'representation' shares much with my own 'self-presentation' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), social dynamics and usage of social media.

To capture such dynamics the interview and focus group data has been transcribed and collated by theme. During the transcribing process, the focus was on the abstraction of the values, emotions and standpoints of the

participants. The main themes included, anxieties about missing friends, how to use Facebook, not having access to social media, and other friends and family use of social media (these will be outlined in more detail in the analysis chapters). At the summing up and close of the interviews and focus groups, there was opportunity to ask individuals what they regarded as the main themes that had come out of the discussion. This strategy was followed throughout the course of the research, and I found that it allowed for further dialogue at the end of meetings, to re-embed responses within the main research agenda and to help identify issues that might otherwise have been left out (Edmunds, 2000). The strategy also proved useful in the writing-up stage of the data, when I was 'watching' for themes, as I found I already had an initial idea of structure from the main topics that the participants had chosen to draw out.

4.9 Summing up

On entering the research field of social media, the data has been shaped by the style and nature of the networks of the participants. Overall the approach involved the recognition of how the participants were shaped by their relationships and their encounters. Thus, the social 'dynamics and demands of judgement' are reliant on 'lived conduct' (Giarelli in Dey, 1993: 219), or to put another way, the interplay between the subject and social life. Within this interplay, is the position of social researcher, also a member of society and with his or her own experience of social life. This has raised questions about the validity of interpretation and ways in which social knowledge can be 'discovered' (May, 2001). Indeed, where it was *I* who entered the field, my own active involvement in networks have contributed to the 'seriously social' of what has emerged as an everyday sensibility.

The current interest in social media reflects this complexity, and it is conspicuous that boyd's (2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2007) work on youth and social networks has little mention of the ethics, or protocols of her research

design. This could be another reason why she has chosen not to publish in peer reviewed academic journals. In terms of social research we can only ever go as far to *safeguard* such issues and to put in place what Hookway (2008: 107) describes as the 'adequate' research parameters. Ultimately such responsibilities fall to the researcher to state what such parameters should include and to foresee the consequences. In the late 1990s, Dicks and Mason (1998: 1) offered a 'constructive' research critique where, 'The synthesis of the visual, aural, verbal and pictorial planes of meaning holds considerable promise for the expansion and deepening of ethnographic knowledge. Publishing ten years after Dicks and Mason (1998), Hookway's (2008: 107) description of online culture and research methodology offers a new research 'window', where her investigation of 'everyday life' through personal blogs, forms part of a 'contemporary negotiation of the 'project of the self' in late/post modern times'. Indeed it is important to note that these ideas and methodological influences are not restricted to just the internet, but how such technological resources are also embedded into, and have consequences for, our social worlds (Beer and Gane, 2008). I draw out these ideas in more detail in the following analysis chapters, and propose as a starting point in the next chapter a four stage set of transitions when using Facebook for the first time.

Figure 4.i Timeline of data collection

Timeline of data collection
October 2005 - Sept 2008

Joined Facebook

facebook

Apr-Jul UK Interviews and focus groups

Sept-Dec Data collection in Aus

Launch of blog, 'A Guide for Proper Facebook Etiquette'.

10 SEPT '08 New style Facebook site launched

Member of Twitter

Attend first Girl Geek Dinner

Girl Geek Dinner Milan

Aust ralia

Oct-05   Jan-06   Apr-06   Jul-06   Oct-06   Jan-07   Apr-07   Jul-07   Oct-07   Jan-08   Apr-08   Jul-08

Dec-Feb Pilot interviews

First personal blog

Channel 4 2Gether08 event

Launch of personal website www.mazphd.com

Join TrustedPlaces

trustedplaces

123

- Chapter Five -
The Start of Social relations on Facebook

'How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives'[54].

(Annie Dillard, 1989, American contemporary writer).

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe the processes that underpinned the individuals' interactions and social networks, when they first joined Facebook. The research participants base these social orientations on the action, and accumulation of social information. By examining what I describe as the 'encounters' that take place across Facebook, I build a picture of the structure of both the personal, and personalised shape of social networks. For those involved in the research, these encounters underpin daily social interaction and have become 'mundane' and 'ordinary'. From the data I identify four emergent stages, which relate to when the research participants first joined Facebook. These comprise, *encouragement, collaboration, reciprocation* and finally *reinforcement.*

5.1 Stage one: encouragement

For the research participants, the first time that the students came into contact with Facebook was *after* they had arrived at university. It is at this moment that we first see the shift from daily co-present contact being based around home life, family and friends, to the opening up of networks to new university connections. To draw attention to this transition, I begin with extracts from one of the first interviews that I conducted at the University of York. In December 2005 I spoke to Adele[55], who described her move to university as,

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[54] *Quote from WisdomQuote.com,* http://www.wisdomquotes.com/cat_time.html
[55] *A pseudonym and coding from the data has been used to indicate the extracts from the participants. 'Y' indicates that the quote is from a student at the University of York and 'M' for*

'frightening, and really intimidating. You're apprehensive about everything, from making new friends, to wondering what your old friends are up to, who you have stuff in common with, who you don't. Most of all I remember having moments when I just wanted to know what was going on. A few of my home friends had not gone to university, and so it was harder for them to appreciate all the changes, and why I didn't necessarily have time to see them anymore. They understood that I have moved away, but they also saw this as me moving on from them (...) looking back, it's still really emotional for me (...) I lost touch with some friends, not that we fell out, just that we were so used to seeing each other around, that when you are not around, you kind of fall out of sync. It's quite traumatic, and no-one prepares you for that! That's why I began to use Facebook. I was curious at first. Then I made up my mind to see if I could use it make better friends with other people who use it, and so it seemed the right thing to do' (Y.3).

The way that Adele felt encouraged and compelled to begin to use Facebook is typical of the experiences of other students at the both the University of York and the University of Melbourne. In Australia, Chris mentioned that he, 'wanted to keep up with my friends, you've seen it for yourself, everyone here is on Facebook!' (M.21). Like Adele, another student, Carson, was also motivated by personal apprehensions, which centred on,

'worrying about my girlfriend (Holly). She went to a different university and I don't like being away from her. We text, we talk, but that was never enough (...) she has a cousin in the States who was on Facebook, and Holly is at Oxford and started on Facebook early. So now we message on Facebook and have our mobiles always on too' (Y.5).

The upheaval and disruption that was experienced during the relocation to university were accentuated by the expectations that students like Adele and Carson already had about 'moving away', and chiefly, 'making friends'. Adele described how she was 'frightened' and 'apprehensive', and curious about 'what her friends were doing' (Y.3). In a similar way, Carson's motivation to

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the University of Melbourne. The number refers to the sequence of the participant in the data table that are included in the Appendix. Codes that include 'Gp' are to show that the quote is from a focus group.

join Facebook was born out of a sense of wanting to keep in touch with his girlfriend and the feeling that he 'didn't like being away from her'. For these reasons, Facebook held appeal with the research participants where it was seen to offer a 'stable' backdrop at a time when their social networks were seen to be shifting, in a state of flux and could be considered 'under threat' (Y.3).

Underlining the initial motivations to sign up to Facebook are the everyday habits, routines and friendships that the students already had in place before university. Adele describes how she lost contact with some friends when they fell 'out of sync' (Y.3). To account for why this was the case, Adele mentioned a 'moment of realisation when I knew that I wouldn't have the same friends again' (Y.3). In this regard, all of Adele's social action was centred on the alignment of her new networks at university, which were supported by Facebook. The loss of the routine contact with friends that Adele and others had 'at home' could not be reproduced at the University of York, as network was gated to only university users. The friends that were 'left behind' (Y.3) were seen as socially *inactive,* as they were excluded from the new Facebook university network links. Adele and Carson's description of the potential divisions in networks is typical of the other research participants' experiences, who spoke of having to 'activate' new networks at university (Y.6). Hence, whilst Facebook represented a means to order and stabilise connections with others, these were only with other friends who had the same type of access to the site. Looking closer at the motivation for contact, we can begin to identify a period of readjustment. This was marked by the moment the students first joined the university network and, like Adele and Carson, had to realign friendship networks.

In Australia, there was a subtle, but notable difference in the way students first felt encouraged to join Facebook and described using the site. Generally, the students at the University of Melbourne were quicker to sign

up to Facebook compared to those with whom I had already spoken and observed at the University of York, before September 2006. This was despite the timing of Facebook's platform launch in Australia in December 2005, some two months after the equivalent launch in the United Kingdom (see Chapter Three, timeline of SNSs, figure 3.ii, page 88). During my stay at the University of Melbourne, I speculated about the possible reasons for the different pattern of Facebook use. One observation was that unlike students at the University of York, in Australia it was more common for students to stay in their 'home' city, with established friends and family links closer to hand. Another difference was the variation in the provision of mobile telecommunications between the two nations. Indeed, my own experience of purchasing and setting up a new Pay-As-You-Go mobile account in Australia, drew attention to the monopoly hold of the telecommunications company Telstra. This resulted in a limited choice of handsets, tariff rates, and network services. For the students at the University of Melbourne, mobile telecommunications was one of their main concerns, or 'gripes' on the university campus. This issue came out as one of the principal 'encouragement' elements when participants joined Facebook. Rachel describes how she was,

> 'dubious at first about Facebook (...) but then it was huge! There was this tidal wave of friends that were suddenly on it and all at the same time! I've used MySpace before, but everyone's so young and there's pressure to join groups that you don't really want to, and to friend just anyone and everyone (...) Facebook took hold cos it's just for students, and that was my friends and me (...) and I never get a decent signal on my mobile on campus, and its too expensive to keep calling everyone by chance, so Facebook's the best way to stay in touch' (M.5).

Rachel was not the only interviewee who felt that neither her mobile phone nor email provided a satisfactory contact with her peers. Tom, a friend of Rachel's, shared a similar motivation when he felt encouraged to join Facebook. Tom described his friends 'incessant use' of Facebook, and the 'crap network coverage on campus' (M.12) as the main reasons to join.

Increasingly the concern was to know what was 'going on' with friends, as swiftly and as reliably as possible. Thus, connections began to rely upon the exchange of messages that could be 'picked up, read, and responded to' (M.12) in a consistent and dependable form, and then acted upon without delay.

At the University of Melbourne, and as members of the university network, it was also usual for students to join one of the twelve associated college groups. The college groups were seen as reflective of student associations which had already been established at the university, as Chris explained to me when I first arrived to stay at Ormond College,

> 'so you'll want to join the Ormond Group on Facebook. We're all on there, and that's where everything happens (...) it's the first thing I did before I knew anyone at Ormond, and the easiest way to make friends' (M.21).

By comparison, at the University of York, the college association was not as influential. The research participants who were part of the University of York network made no mention of college groups, or any other shared associations on Facebook. For Chris and other Melbourne students it was important that his initial encounters with others at Ormond College were encouraged through the collective association of the college group. He saw this as a way for students 'get to know each other, especially if they're shy (...) and it gives a feeling of solidarity' (M.21). In this way, rather than being distributed across the university network on Facebook, students at the University of Melbourne were assured a familiarised setting for interactions. Here the initiation of friendships was underpinned by college membership and further specialisation of the main university network. Clubs and societies that were also specific to a college were also coordinated across Facebook. I spoke to a group of students from Trinity College, and Arnos mentioned,

> 'Our group is the best on Facebook! Go Trinity! (laughing). We're already organising the big row event for the row team on Facebook, that'll mean that

128

everyone will be involved. It's easier than posting stuff in the Common Room'
(M.Gp.2.i).

The same associations were absent from connections made between students at the University of York. Interestingly in my first focus group, Adam dismissed Facebook university groups as, 'sad', and later went on to pronounce that,

> *'Only saddo's join groups! What's wrong with your friends? Nah I'm already on a network, why would I want to join a group. The colleges are crap anyway!'*
> (Y.Gp.1.i).

Of more central importance to participants at the University of York was the accumulation of links that were formed around the main university network. The college association was viewed as 'unnecessary', and 'uncool', (Y.GP.1.i) which meant there was limited appeal for these students to join the university college groups. Interestingly at the time of focus group FG.1, which was held in January 2006, only three of the eight colleges at the University of York had affiliated groups on Facebook. We can speculate the reason for the difference in interest and membership of college groups. This could be to do with the comparative size of the student population at each university. Both the campus size and college population at the University of Melbourne is significantly greater than that at the University of York. As a guideline, the headcount for the number of undergraduates in 2006 at the University of York, was 7,762, and at the University of Melbourne, 28,843[56]. It was noticeable that at the university of Melbourne the students who had been encouraged by their college association formed stronger community attachment to others as a result of their group and college membership. One participant mentioned how the college group he was a member of, 'feels like a real community away from home' (M.21). This was quickly matched by participation in other events and activities within the college, 'on the college page you always know what's going on, that's enough reason for me to use

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[56] *Statistics from QS University rankings, QS Quacquarelli Symonds Limited*
http://www.topuniversities.com/schools/data/school profile/

Facebook' (M.21). Indeed, whilst students at the University of York are formally arranged around college membership, there is less emphasis on these associations as an integral part of the students' experience.

At both the Universities of Melbourne and York, Facebook took hold, because the students had felt *encouraged*, and began to *collaborate* with friends who were already using the site. The boundaries between the previously online and the offline communication of email and IM, and the 'on' and 'off' of mobile phone coverage, declined in importance. Instead, connections were built up and held in place by *known* connections of friends and the membership of relevant networks, or college groups. In the following section I outline how an essential part of the process of becoming familiarised with Facebook, is the *collaborative* effort of socially *active* individuals and participatory social practices.

5.2 Stage two: collaboration

Thus far, participants' perception of Facebook were shaped by their evaluation of old and new friendship networks, judged to be either 'secure' (Y.5) and therefore easily maintained, or 'shaky' (Y.3) and hence at a distance from the new networks formed at university. From the data, participants frequently mentioned how their behaviour was constantly matched to others, with attention to the possible actions, expectations and responses of others. In one interview, Sarah observed how,

> *'My uni friends are always using Facebook, and I'm using it more and more too. I wish that some of my friends at home could also join (...) I'm so aware of what everyone else is doing'* (M.31).

This kind of evaluative behaviour lies at the heart of Mead's (1934) mechanism of the self, in so far as it involves the continual awareness of others, by the assessment and reassessment of social action. In terms of the organisation of the self, and social expectations across Facebook, this section deals with the collaborative ethos of the site. I have already described how

the students felt encouraged to join Facebook. Once a member of the site, there was uniformity in the type of conduct and impulses for building relationships with others. Henry's experience was not untypical of other interviewees',

> 'email was something that was uninteresting to me, and I had too much spam
> for it to mean anything. When Facebook first came out I was gutted that it
> wasn't around when I was a Fresher, how fun would that have been?! (...) now
> everyone's on Facebook, so you don't miss out (...) you check out your friend's
> pages, so you know what's happening. It wouldn't mean anything without
> your friends. It would just be another website' (Y.10).

It is through the interaction with others that Facebook takes on meaning and has a very specific value for the user. The individual has the opportunity to judge, evaluate and act prompted by personal motivation. In this way, the attitude and assumed response of others' actions, shape the social actions of the individual. This type of collaboration forms part of the necessary mechanism for interaction, and as we shall go on to see, the guiding principles the next stage of reciprocated conduct. For Deacon, this process was evident in the manner in which he choose to 'make friends' on Facebook. At the University of Melbourne, talking in a focus group of six people, Deacon described how he rated his measure of personal success, by popularity. He stated how he has,

> 'loads of friends on Facebook. More than you! (nods to his friend Daniel).
> During the first term and Fresher's week we had a race to see who could get
> the most friends. You would go to a party and say, 'be my Facebook friend!'
> (M.Gp.5.i).

Deacon represents the most extreme level of social persuasion and 'agenda' in terms of applying a deliberate and instrumental method to recruit friends. This scenario prompted the posting, 'Friend Farm[57]' on my blog. An extract from which follows (see figure 5.i, overleaf),

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[57] http://properfacebooketiquette.blogspot.com/2007/08/friend-farm.html

131

Figure 5.i Extract from Proper Facebook Etiquette blog, 'Friend Farm'
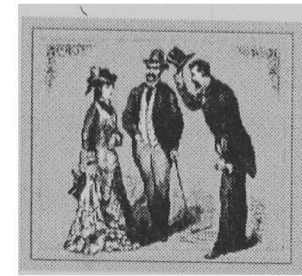
FRIDAY, AUGUST 3, 2007

Friend Farm

I have received friends requests from a number of people
(primarily from high school) whom after I accept their
request ignore my standard social nicety message 'thanks
for the friends request...glad to see you are doing
well...how do you enjoy working in industry X?'. I must
assume from this that they have no interest in sparking up
even a net acquaintance, and are simply friend farming or
curious about my life. Is the correct approach to then
remove them from my friend list?

Friends and friendships are vital to Social Networking
Sites (SNS), without them you simply would not be linked
up, 'in the know' nor have anything to read and distract
you from during your morning, lunch and tea breaks. It is
the height of rudeness then when once you have
'recommenced' a friendship with someone that they do not
reply to your 'social nicety' query. Naturally people will
gravitate toward one another on SNS's, sadly not because
you ARE the most witty, intelligent, charming individual
in the pack, but you are 'known' to one another and who
wouldn't want to be part of such a mutual connection.

In the focus group, Deacon's description of the manner in which he had recruited friends, was treated with a level of disapproval and condemnation from others in the session. Deacon's friend, Daniel, made known that he,

> 'disapproved of that! Yeah we had a competition, but only for fun, it wasn't serious. I don't really care how many friends I have, so long as they are all hot! JOKING! (...) I wouldn't be so desperate to go out and say to someone 'be my Facebook friend'. Facebook is about the friends that you already have' (M.Gp.5.ii).

In keeping with Daniel's assessment of Facebook that is, 'about the friends that you *already* have' (M.Gp.5.ii), the ten comments that I received to the above blog post, revealed how users were attuned to the articulation of their real relationships. This was instead of going through a process of adding 'false friends' (Anonymous, Friday, 3 August, 2006), 'just for the sake of it'

132

(5degrees, Saturday, 4 August, 2006). Deacon is unusual in his competitive approach, as others in the focus group pointed out. For Danielle what mattered to her most was the, 'quality of my friends' (M.Gp.5.iiii), which was assessed by the closeness of connection, rather than the quantity of connections she had on Facebook. Martine felt, 'I wouldn't be on Facebook if it weren't for my friends', (M.Gp.5.vi). Hence Facebook quickly constituted a social space for those wanting to engage with 'alike' others across the site. As is evident from the data extracts, this space is perceived as having greater value the more an individual's existing group of friends are already present and can also enter the same social space. There is a sense whereby this increasing membership of friends acts as a social magnet. Both at the University of York and the University of Melbourne, Facebook was an increasingly 'hot topic' for casual conversation in the student bars and other social areas. At both universities on numerous occasions I overheard students talking about Facebook, and also accessing the site via laptops in these areas. At the university of Melbourne it was through overhearing a conversation about Facebook, that I recruited for my second focus group. The students were willing to take part in the research where part of the appeal was that they recognised how their relationships were increasingly managed and maintained through Facebook, 'everyone I know is on Facebook now (...) that's how we keep our group together' (M.Gp.2.i).

During my stay at Ormond College, many of the activities and events that were organised were broadcast on Facebook. The students frequently mentioned actions and social occurrences that had taken place on the site during daily Common Room gatherings. One incident that stands out, was the arrival of two new overseas students to the college. Their introduction to Ormond was first announced on the Ormond Group Page on Facebook and then followed by invitation to a 'Welcome BBQ Party' event. Later, pictures from this event were shared and tagged on the college group page. This points to the value placed on the close connections of friends and, for the

133

Australian students, the associated College Group status. Other loose, and what might be termed as 'acquaintance' connections in other spaces, did not impact as much on emotional or social life. As Daniel's friends noted earlier, the simple acquisition of a large friendship network on Facebook to demonstrate the 'popularity', or the connectedness of one individual, is perceived by others as an incorrect reading of the purposes of the site. Indeed, in the eyes of Danielle and Martine this was viewed as devaluing the quality of the connection. Thus, if social status might be displayed through the initial Profile that users create, this is not advanced by the deliberate strategy of a high-degree of uncoordinated activity on the site. However it should be remembered there is evidence that the quantified accumulation of friends holds appeal, typically with the younger users of other SNSs, such as MySpace (boyd, 2006b; 2007). As I shall go on to explain later, Facebook like other SNSs is shaped by the characteristics and interactions of those who use it. The site, therefore, continues to reflect its original elitist stance, when it in initially available to members of a Higher Education Institutions. Note that this also points to the significance of how people use and follow rules of conduct in social spaces, which will be explored in greater detail in Chapters Six and Seven.

This conception of Facebook enables us to see how the shaping of Facebook networks does not occur out of 'nothing', but functions to detail the networks and relations that already exist in our social world. Deacon's mention of a competitive accumulation of Facebook friends represents the most extreme model to create networks. More generally this process reflects a widespread student experience that was taking place at this time. This is apparent through the deliberate recording of friend relations on the site, and as I will go on to argue in the next section, the anticipation and reciprocation of social action.

5.3 Stage three: reciprocation

Up to this point I have examined the motivating factors for joining Facebook, and some of the collaborative elements of the site, such as the necessity to establish friend connections. In this section we explore in more detail what happens during the 'friending' process. I have chosen to frame this stage as the *reciprocation* of emergent social interactions and potentialities that developed during the earlier stages the participants first began to use Facebook.

I have already described the process involved with adding a friend on Facebook as 'formal' (to remind the reader of the technical procedures involved with adding a friend on Facebook, see Chapter Three). Whilst there are no rules about the practicalities of using Facebook, the site is set up so users must follow certain conventions as shaped by the software. For example, the site structure of Facebook means that after one user has sent a friend request to another, they share a 'snapshot' element of their Profile Page, which generally consists of the main Profile image and Basic Information box (the level of detail is controlled by the user's Privacy Settings). The standardisation of the Friend Request action means that this is the same for *all* users, and has remained largely unchanged since the site launched. It is during the exchange of action when the awareness of friends takes on significance. For example, Chris had concerns that his initiation of a Friend Request could be, 'ignored. Or worse' (M.36). When asked to expand upon what he meant by 'or worse' (M.36), he explained,

> *'I guess I mean for those friends that you know less well. So by ignoring you, it's just someone saying they don't want to connect to you, but if they accept your Friend Request and don't really mean it (pause) well how are you ever going to know that? You could think that you are friends with someone, but really you're not, and now they can see everything about you'* (M.36).

Mead (1934) has described the importance of the acknowledgement of group action for the coordination of social behaviour by the individual. Indeed, it is the capacity of the individual to be able to 'take the role of the other' that

forms a significant part of the socialising experience and is essential for the management of social action and identity. By examining the protocols and sets of procedures that each student had to put into practice, we begin to notice a *social* shaping of accumulative interactions that goes beyond the shared protocols of the software. What I am suggesting is that whilst the software, in a sense, 'forces' the users to set up actions and to interact in particular ways, how these are interpreted and received by others is still open to negotiation. Antonia shared some of Chris's concerns, when she described how the Friend Request contained an overarching sense of anxiety, 'as you can never be sure if someone is going to accept or reject you' (Y.37). It was when initiating Friend Requests that individuals had heightened awareness of their 'image' and sought assurance from others. Where, as students, individuals first felt *encouraged* onto the site by friends, and had to *collaborate* with others to start to put in place networks, they then sought *reciprocation* of these actions. As George explains,

> *'friending someone is the easy bit. It's what happens after that that counts. After, if they don't respond and ignore you, you're left with wondering why. So when you're sent a Friend Request, it's the done thing as everyone adds that person. It's the right thing to do (...) then if you don't receive anything back, or if you never communicate with that person again, well that erodes away at you. And so yeah, you wonder why. I'm sure it's not just me! (laughing)*
> (Y.48).

We can see from George's account that the process of sending a Friend Request, whilst of some importance, is considered secondary to the potential outcome of the action, 'if they don't respond and ignore you' (Y.48). This type of interaction requires a different level of engagement compared to the 'normal' situation of being friends with someone. When one user initiates action, the related interactions are built up through a process of self-actualisation and continued self-assessment. For example, my blog post 'And

you are?...'[58] posted on Monday, 2 July 2007, explored the dilemmas of dealing with a Friend Request from someone of whom you 'have no idea, or recollection' (see figure 5.ii),

Figure 5.ii Extract from Proper Facebook Etiquette blog, 'And you are?...'

MONDAY, JULY 2, 2007

And you are?...

How do I respond to someone's friend request if I have no idea, or recollection of who they are?

First and foremost you never ask directly 'who are you'. That is the height of rudeness, making not only yourself look less than sophisticated or lacking in social refining but also completely undermines the person's potential significance to you.

Such a scenario is also likely to result in a terse, or embarrassed response from the sender – they are upset as you have no recollection or clue as to whom they may be, and you look stupid from not remembering.

One of the commentaries posted to the blog was from Ana, who described her 'fretfulness' about not receiving recognition of her request. Ana felt this meant that she had been 'left to fade into the background', and she went on to query whether this meant that 'I am being ignored, or overlooked, were they ever my friend at all?' (Ana, Wednesday, 4 July 2007). There is what can be described as an evaluative process that is integral to Friend Requests, and the anticipated reciprocated actions that follows. More attention is given to how these requests are received by others and the awareness of potential participation, and acceptance of the profiled image of the individual. This evaluation and accompanying series of action is made clearer by Sarah's concerns,

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[58] *http://properfacebooketiquette.blogspot.com/2007/07/and-you-are.html*

'I could never friend someone that I didn't know, that would be too weird (...) it's not internet dating is it?! When I first got onto the site I did Friend Request my ex, nothing major just a 'hi' message with the add friend. I made sure that my Profile looked good, and that I had a flattering Profile picture (...) I saw that he looked hot, and was thinking about him and it was so easy to get in touch. There is no way I would've have gone there with a bad page! I wanted to show off, not make him think 'oh' and be disappointed. (...) so yeah I wanted him to pay attention to me and to look at me again' (M.31).*

We return here to the importance of self-image, and how the Profile Page of a user is elevated to a position where it carries significant social 'weight'. For research participants like Rachel, Facebook is not seen as a site for the encounter of anonymous others. Indeed, she exclaims, 'its not internet dating is it?!' Similarly, three of the seven comments from my blog post made mention of digital social networks as a form of internet dating. One Anonymous poster asked 'So is Facebook and other SNS the new internet dating resource?' (3:56 PM, 2 July 2007), to which another Anonymous poster replied,

'No - well not really - as Internet dating is a million$ industry and makes money by more or less putting stranger together. Maz's point is that SNS is different and so 'dating as such may happen but only as a spin off NOT as the core reason people use Social Network Sites' (4:05 PM, 2 July 2007).

For the research participants, Facebook represents a *focused* resource for relations. Here image and identity must be set up and displayed in the 'right way' (M.31) to receive the appropriate attention from others. As Cheryl explains 'it's no good having a crap Profile, no-one's going to pay you attention!' (M.38). Earlier Cheryl had outlined how her Profile Page is recognisable, 'as me. I wouldn't put up a fake photo, or make up information (...) my friends would get me for that. I would be found out immediately!' (M.38). Robinson (2007: 108) explores similar issues, drawing on Goffman and Mead she proposes a 'cyberself-ing project' that 'redefines' the 'online venues' and 'preserves the dynamics of interactional cuing'. Critical to this framing is the experience of interactions as these have 'real' consequences.

Whilst I do not agree with Robinson's (2007) term of the 'cyberself', the acknowledgement of the 'same' self-ing interplays online and offline has resonances with other research participants' attitudes and accounts of using social media. However, it is wrong to view these as *cyber*interactions' as, for the students, such modes of sociability and self-expression are a continuation of *real* and *authentic* information, whether in an offline or online context.

I propose that the interactional dimension of self-image is two-fold. First, seen in the eyes of the individual, the Profile Page serves the purpose to store personal information and is viewed as a space to display aspects of the self. Second, there is awareness of the *intended* interpretation of this image and associated social information by others. To return to Sarah, these concerns were intensified by the Friend Request sent to her ex-boyfriend 'I saw that he looked hot, and was thinking about him and it was so easy to get in touch' (M.31). The Friend Request in this instance represents Sarah's anticipated intention of 'reinitiating' contact with her ex, first through a collaborative token action and then for this to be reciprocated by follow-up contact. By being seen to go along with the conventional 'rules' of Facebook, for example, the action of sending a Friend Request, this enables Sarah to put herself forward through a seemingly casual and informal gesture. However, as Sarah reveals the motivation and intention of her own action is far from casual, and holds emotive meaning. The information that is communicated to her 'ex' during this process is centred on two sets of interpretations. These ideas are evident from two different scenarios, one scenario is that Sarah's ex chooses to ignore her Friend Request, and does not look at her Profile. The other scenario is when the ex does accept Sarah's Friend Request, and follows up this action with either communicative action, and/or observation of Sarah's actions and her Profile image.

In reference to interaction orderliness, Goffman (1963) has drawn two sets of distinctions between levels of interaction, as a 'main involvement' and a

'side involvement'. For example, in the previously described situation, Sarah's 'main involvement' is to initiate and to receive back a mutually accepted Friend Request. Running alongside, her 'side involvement' is whatever else Sarah holds as being of significance. This includes, whether her ex will look at her Profile Page, how he will react to the information and image that Sarah has displayed there, as well as the possibility that her ex does not respond. Both dimensions hold social significance as a measure of 'success' or 'failure' of the encounter. In this scenario Sarah shares concerns with other participants, who possessed what I observed as a reflexive self-monitoring. This is led by the sense of image, as a measure of 'self worth' (M.31), and the ways in which individuals seek accompanying reciprocated action from others. In essence, Sarah's primary frame for self-analysis is her sense of presence that is a necessary component of all of the encounters on Facebook and other social media. At this stage we are beginning to draw away from the simple reciprocation of interaction, toward a sense of reinforcement of the social relationship. I explore these dilemmas in more detail in the next section.

5.4 Stage four: reinforcement

This stage draws on the significance of the mutuality of connections and *reinforcement* of relationships. Connections are influenced by the awareness of the intended motivation for interaction and the anticipated response that gives meaning to the relationship and shared communication. This analytical distinction is important, where we have a change of emphasis from the communication of social action, to a confirmation, or rejection of a social relationship. This key distinction is evident from Kelly's concerns when she described how 'strangers' would try to contact her,

> *'I have received messages and requests (friend) from people I don't know. But they are mostly from people in my network, who go here (Melbourne University), and they already know my friends. Mostly it's from people in other colleges, cos we belong to the same group, or someone wants to introduce you. That's happened to me before!'* (M.23).

This was a rare occurrence in the early stages of the data collection where only four others mentioned that they had been contacted directly in this manner. Described by Kelly as a 'stranger' (M.23), I was interested if she felt that such connection was inappropriate. She explained to me,

> *'I don't feel violated. We share the same network and friends, and go to the same university. It's natural that we would bump into each other anyway (on campus). I don't think there's anything wrong with it, it feels natural to me'* (M.23).

Kelly's description of how the students, 'would bump into each other anyway' (M.23) reflects how life on campus is easily and seamlessly compared to interactions across Facebook. Where the students had initially forged a progression of their known social networks onto Facebook, others also reinforced Kelly's outlook about the 'naturalness' (M.23) of this scenario. Ralph took for granted how such progression, 'was always going to happen' (Y.19). A core awareness of the appropriate level of interaction indicates a continual monitoring of information, actions and activities by the research participants. Thus, for Kelly, such actions do not appear as threatening, or what might in another context be considered 'abnormal'. By the end of the research, such incidents had become a characteristic of student interactions, and is also an integral component of the technology. Ralph's observation was typical,

> *'I get randomly friended all the time on Facebook. Usually they have a connection to me, even if it's just a random one. Like a girl who got in touch cos I wrote on her friend's Wall, and she liked the link I posted. Usually it's friends of friends. I've never had a complete stranger get in touch'* (Y.19).

My question to Ralph was, 'What constituted a 'complete stranger?'' (mh) in his eyes, his reply, 'you know, someone not on your network. (Who's) (...) just a random' (Y.19). Social media, and related networks are seen as a natural extension of social occurrences that arise using such resources. Another way to frame this is as the social opportunities, or potentiality of a given network. As of March 2008, on Facebook, 'New Friends' are suggested as someone who 'You May Know', on the NewsFeed page. Thus, more

complex than just the monitoring of one another, the technology prompts users to engage with others. In this way the suggestion of 'New Friends' is 'normalised' by the context of the site, which is seen to 'authenticate' the unknown other. For example, on my own main Facebook Home Page, the site makes 'suggestions' for my potential new friends (see figure 5.iii).

Figure 5.iii Image of 'People You May Know' Application on Facebook
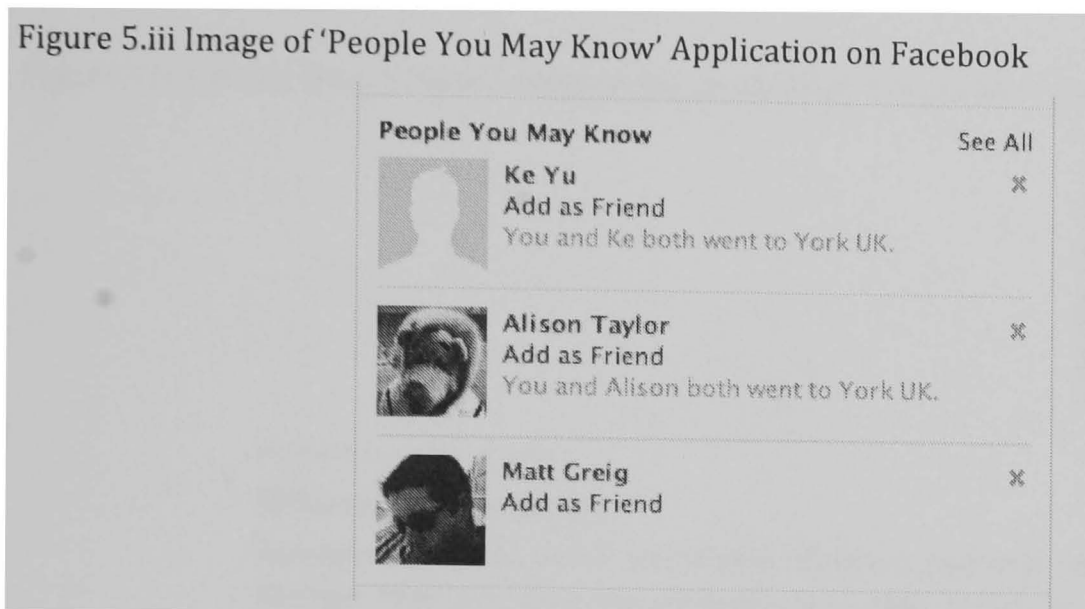
Connections like those shown above are identified by the site's calculation of the 'closeness' of other people included in my network. This link is indicated by the number of friends that we may share in common. For Ralph such Applications were seen as 'unnecessary' on Facebook, where he described,

> *'I'm not that bothered with people I don't know (...) you can sometimes see how many friends you have in common with someone, so it's like you know them already'* (Y.19).

During the Friending process, the user pauses to reflect, first how they may know the other, and then the motivation and context for the connection. This process echoes what in another context, Graham (2005), has referred to as 'software sorting'. The individual may feel obligated to respond and to pursue such connections. In Goffman (1981) 'Response Cries', he notes the minute adjustments of the individual when they encounter a situation where the reaction of others is unexpected or potentially alarming. He argues how reactions range from 'civil disattention', and one can infer 'rejection' of the

142

other, to a friendly acknowledgement and monitoring or acceptance of the other. Ultimately what the students are seeking is the reinforcement of their interaction, which then strengthens the reciprocated relationship. These issues were the inspiration for a blog post entitled 'Theory of Facebook[59]', posted 14 May 2008 (see figure 5.iv),

Figure 5.iv Extract from Proper Facebook Etiquette blog, 'Theory of Facebook'

WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2008

Theory of Facebook

Remember when you first discovered Facebook and SNSs and thought that you were the original one, just having a laugh and catching up with friends? Au contraire, you were (and now are) part of a whole cultural shift in social dynamics about how people meet, greet, stay in touch and interact on a daily basis.

SNSs have become more than just a way to indicate a 'high-school esque' popularity. Instead, they have emerged as significant *collaborative* social spaces that contain more important social connections and subtle cues for presentation and interaction. This could be viewed as a 'hyper' set of dimensions and intimacies. Hyper, because they are fast occuring and reflect the *excessively* active aspects of the social dynamics. But I would contend that they are more immersive and seductive than a hyper set of behaviours. Yes things occur in the fast lane of life, but these have real life (and real time) consequences.

In the post I outlined eight key dimensions to Facebook, and argued under the subtitle 'All together now' how,

> 'There's a level of emotionality at the heart of any connection; whether friend, acquaintance, family or peer (...) there's a feeling of togetherness, put in place by the accepted friend invitation and shared network membership (...) rejecting a Friend Request carries as much social weight offline as it does on

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[59] http://properfacebooketiquette.blogspot.com/2008/05/theory-of-facebook.html

143

the site (...) (and) are comparable to the complex sets of connections with others away from these networks' (Wednesday, 14 May 2008).

Such interactions are underpinned by a growing awareness of the norms and values that go alongside them. This, in turn, has made for increased anxiety amongst participants about the implications of social action, and consequences for their relationships. It is understandable, therefore, that the intention and consequences of social interaction become foregrounded in association with the interchange of expected communication. To return to the moment when one individual seeks to 'Friend' another, this represents more than a casual prompt, but is seen as a 'rite of introduction', which is invested with social meaning. In my third focus group, held at Melbourne University in November 2006, Linda described two scenarios from such modes of contact,

> *'well if you're in the same network, then that's ok, I mean you can just Friend someone, and its not weird. Other times if it's just a random then I tend to ignore those kinds of Requests. I've Friended other people at my college. Like when I first arrived I didn't know anyone, and there was an Ormond (College) Group Page which I joined (...) actually that's how I met my boyfriend. But like I said it's not weird as you're both in the same situation, and you kind of know each other anyway'* (M.Gp.3.iii).

The sequencing and justification of how Linda initiated some of her friends on Facebook has resonances with the vocabulary of 'roles' (Goffman, 1959). Linda's interest and involvement with the Ormond Group meant that she was able to justify her connection to previously unknown others. The shared situational context, and reinforcement of her actions was through the group and associated network membership. In this way Linda's description of how she met her boyfriend is not considered 'weird', as their introduction was successful precisely because of the collective association of being at the same university, and the same college. Here such actions are reinforced by the normative display of actions by others, for example Linda went on to explain, 'everyone from Ormond's in the group' (M.Gp.3.iii). Thus, as Goffman (1959) reminds us, there is a 'veneer of consensus', where the actions of the

144

individual are legitimised both by the situation and others' response. Indeed the 'consensus that arises', is when 'participants contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation' (Goffman, 1959: 9). Linda's actions may be understood as a broad show of unanimity, where her use of Facebook, together with membership of the Melbourne University network and Ormond College Group, gives meaning to consequent interactions. Through Linda, I was able to speak with her boyfriend, Lee, who described how they first 'met',

> 'it was all on Facebook. We had mutual friends already, and we're at the same college. I thought Linda looked cute from her Profile (...) she was the one who messaged me, and I Poked back. I saw that she was friends with my roommate, so I already knew she wasn't some psycho! It turned out we're both on the rowing team too (...) the first time we met up was when we all had our doonas[60] out in the Common Room for the sleep-over party' (M.32).

Lee's rationalisation that 'she wasn't some psycho!' (M.32), facilitated the initial interaction and message exchange. Linda and Lee's introduction to one another was further validated by the assessment that she 'looked cute' (M.32), and they were both 'in the same situation' (M.Gp.3.iii). As separate interactants, Linda and Lee both reveal aspects about themselves through the exchange of direct messages, as well as the open access to their Profile Pages. Before meeting in the co-present, Linda and Lee both already knew a lot of information about each other, and the friends that they had in common. This is vital for the 'veneer of consensus' that allows for each individual to effectively read the social situation and establish what at this stage was a tentative relationship (Goffman, 1959). However, the connection was not allowed to progress until an in-person meeting had reinforced both Linda and Lee's association, where the instigated relation could be strengthened. Thus between two Facebook friends, after a reciprocal show of shared

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[60] In Australia a duvet or down quilt is called a 'doona'.

relations, the relationship is further reinforced by the participatory involvement of social action both across social media and face-to-face.

The membership and association to the university network allowed for a protected strategy for participants' modes of engagement. Such practices comprise 'techniques', which are employed to safeguard the different types of action offered, and sense of presence before others. In later analysis I go on to define such social action as 'presence techniques', which recognise the performance of the individual as managed by their impression and reception from others.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has described the way that Facebook came to enter the lives of students. While this might have been at different times in the respective universities, the result was the same, in that increasing numbers of students quickly adopted Facebook as a new space in which to conduct their social lives. In some cases, this meant that individuals moved away from other SNSs that they had previously used. The migration to Facebook relates to the way that various users have noted that you were somehow 'left out', if you did not use the site. Facebook, while important for establishing and shaping friendship and social activities amongst university students, also became used as a way to 'catch-up', or included friends and others who were left at home. Indeed, once students were set-up on Facebook, there is a sense of how their connections are consistent with already established friendship dynamics and therefore quickly become embedded within everyday sociability. The following chapter builds on the desire to be 'one of the many' and the incorporation of social interaction into daily life. I argue that it is necessary for the individual to establish a sense of presence, which is used as a platform for all interaction. This is framed by what I conceive as 'profile presence', which refers to the construction and reconstruction of identity

146

across social media. I explore how the self is manifest as a part of the social experience and the encounter of social action shared with others.

- Chapter Six -

A Facebook Profile Presence

'The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action.'

(John Dewey, 1916, American philosopher)

Introduction

This chapter develops the notion of a 'profile presence', which contains three inter-related elements. I argue that the social encounters on Facebook and the coordination of other social media information are, *Anchored in the real*, concerned with, *The display of a 'brand image'*, and are *Inherently social.* These elements combine dynamically and, for the participants in the study, relate seamlessly to a consistent, detailed and nuanced profile presence. I engage the theorisation of social identity as a reflexive model of the self, and remain critical of the tendency of some social theorists to represent this as a multifarious and transformative identity. Instead, I place emphasis on the continuity and extension of the processes of the self as identifiable traits of the individual, which are reproduced as part of a reflexive engagement with known others. It is argued that pre-established social norms and values continue to have significance in the shaping of what has been conceived as a 'real' (where this is in opposition to a virtual) self. Drawing on Mead (1934) the potentiality mentioned by other commentators, such as Giddens's (1991) project of the self, is explained as a constituent of real relationships and the construct of an authentic self-image. This dissection of presence is undertaken for the purposes of the analysis and it should be recognised that most of the research participants would not necessarily view their Profile as broken up and socially conducive in this way. However, the three elements usefully relate to the stages noted in the previous chapter, and help to navigate through the complexities of social encounters as they occurred

across Facebook, and began to tie to other social media. Each of the three elements is explored in detail below.

6.1 First element: anchored in the real

The material self acts as a platform from which the user Profile (as argued in Chapter Five) is initially established. Consequently the Profile is always emergent, in that there is never a 'final version'; rather there is a *presence* that is continually re-written in the light of individual experiences, some of which are shared across Facebook as well as other social media. Thus, profile presence is distinct from other writers' notions about, 'online' identity, 'cyberself', or creation of a 'cyberme' (e.g. McClimens and Gordon, 2008; Robinson, 2007; Turkle, 1995; WasKul and Douglas, 1997). In essence the profile presence is the aspect of identity that the individual *wants* to present to friends and is expressed as, close to a true-to-life depiction as possible. In one interview, Antonia made this clear when she reflected on how,

> *'I wouldn't want anything untrue said about me on Facebook. Or anything false on my Profile. It's important to me that my friends know that it's me, that they can recognise me (...) and you never know who might be trying to find you, or to contact you, so if you looked so different from how they know you, they might think twice about getting in touch'* (Y.37).

Antonia's account is typical of other interviewees who also described an internalised style of reflection and awareness of the impression they display to friends. From this standpoint, the judgement of an individual forms an inseparable mode of self-expression and is also seen as a social resource. For example, for Antonia, her encounters were measured by how, 'I look at my friends' Profiles. I take notice of how they look and what it shows me' (Y.37). Hence the process of 'reading' another's Profile Page is a social action in itself. Antonia is one of a number of research participants who felt that they had been 'influenced' by the 'look' and 'feel', of their own and friends' Profile Pages. Such engagement is part of an ongoing interaction process, where individuals are aware of the interplay of actions, symbols, gestures and even

the language that are a part of their friendship exchanges (cf. Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). For example, Antonia wants her friends to 'know that it's me' (Y.37). Hence, Antonia's Profile Page and related information on Facebook are intended to provide a coherent representation of the self. There is a sense here of the 'just in case', as Antonia is concerned the friends that she has lost touch with can 'recognise' her, as the assumption is that they, 'might be trying to find' (Y.37) her. Thus, *only* when the profile presence is aligned and seen to be in 'harmony' with the self interaction can then proceed. Another perspective was offered by Joe, who described how Profile Pages were 'vital' (Y.34) in shaping how he viewed both his own and made judgements about his friends'. He clarified how,

> 'a Profile that looks fake is not worth paying any attention to. Most people don't do it, and if something looks too fake, like a photo from years ago, then your friends are the first to let you know! My ex had a really fake looking profile, that only had pics of her and her mates in bikinis from their holiday and loads of Hotness ratings on her Wall (...) Your page has got to look real, to be real' (Y.34).

The display of information on a Profile Page becomes important because of the ways it is used to 'interrogate' another's image and actions. This is a process that can take place even in the absence of any encounter. It is appropriate at this juncture to turn to Goffman (1963), to unpack the meaning of encounters further. Writing about the interaction order, Goffman's construct of the 'social situation', gives prominence to the material interaction setting and associated action of the social actors, which Goffman describes as the, 'mutual monitoring of one another' (Goffman, 1963: 18). This draws attention to the *active* role of the individual as shared *situations* give meaning and a physical setting to interactions. For Goffman (1963: 18) the shared social situations come to an end when the 'next-to-last participant leaves'. On Facebook, the interactant neither enters nor materially leaves a situation. However, interactions are seen as 'real', and have 'real life' consequences in terms of the display of the self and social identity. In this context, it is important to recognise that the display of the self and

interactions across social media, occur in ways that cannot be physically situated. To recognise this shift in emphasis I made a deliberate decision to foreground what Goffman (1963) details as situations, as encounters. The context for this description is explored in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

I return to Joe's comments about his ex-girlfriend's Profile Page, the images used and information related to her identity. In this context, I wanted Joe to clarify why her Profile was seen as 'so fake' by him.

> *'it's not one thing. But if you look at the whole thing together, it's so try hard. Her Minifeed always had stories of the night before, and it looked really MySpacey with all the applications. So together it's so fake'* (Y.34).

Coming to the end of the interview I also asked Joe how he thought his friends viewed his Profile Page, and whether he thought it could be interpreted as 'fake'. Joe responded, 'after we're friends on Facebook you can make your own mind up' (Y.34). The combination of Joe's image of his Profile together with my judgement as a reader (and friend) represents a recurrent pairing in the data, where other research participants also asked about my 'assessment' of their Profile. On my blog I described this as, 'Fakeface, A fake Profile Page. Either completely made up, or so unlike the real person it's not even worth writing on their Wall'[61] (mh) (see figure 6.i, overleaf).

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[61] http://properfacebooketiquette.blogspot.com/2008/04/facebook-glossary.html

Figure 6.i Extract from Facebook Etiquette blog, 'Facebook Glossary'

SUNDAY, APRIL 13, 2008

Facebook Glossary

So enough with the trials and tribulations of Facebooking
for a bit... I've been playing around with some possible
Facebook terms to explain what's going on.

I'm asking for trouble, but I'm sure they'll be some
creative suggestions in the comments...

Fakeface: A fake Profile Page. Either completely made up,
or so unlike the real person it's not even worth writing
on their Wall.

Facesulk: Withdrawing from without explanation and
remaining unresponsive to messages, pokes and posts.

Thus, the presentational display of the Profile Page represents a significant part of who an individual says they are, alongside the whom they are seen to be. I have not included a screen grab of Joe's Profile, as this was deemed to be 'too personal' (Y.34) and he wanted to remain as an anonymous voice in the study. In a follow-up Facebook message exchange, I asked Joe to describe the main elements of his Profile, and to explain why it was not a fake. Joe responded that his page looks, 'just like your page, we both have an image that actually looks like us without any clutter from MySpace style add-ons' (Y.34). Joe ended his message by classifying my own Profile Page as 'unfake', which meant (in his eyes) I was also viewed as 'not being fake' (Y.34). Robinson's (2007: 95) Meadian perspective of a 'cyberself-ing process', describes the self as a 'bifurcated entity', which 'exists both for itself and in itself simultaneously. However, as the earlier contextualisation of encounters and my construction of profile presence suggests, this duality is inappropriate to understand the nuanced and emerging social interactions on Facebook. What is important to note, is that interactions are built together

with friends and anchored in known relationships. Here encounters take on a greater significance than if they were with unknown others.

We have had extracts, both in this and the previous chapter, from research participants whose assessment of a personal identity is experienced as *real* across Facebook. Pamela referred to her, 'Facebook habit' as, 'a way of *being.* You're in touch, you can be there all the time, even when you have to log out' (Y.50). Such 'ways of being' had impact on the other social media resources that these young were using. In my second interview with Joe he wanted me to know that,

> *'I have more than one Profile. Facebook is my main one, but you can find me all over the place. Like I use Twitter, and YouTube a lot (...) you can link to the lot from Facebook'* (Y.34).

In effect, social media provide the opportunity to connect with friends, in what might be described as a *reflexive* mode of interaction. When prompted as to whether such activities represented 'a *new* way of being', Pamela replied,

> *'well I'm a philosophy student, so I'm into this kind of thought process. My friends will tell you I can be very existential about it! I think they mean too serious! When I use Facebook, I don't think that it's a new me on there, it's already a part of me. Or at least a representation of me. I guess the best way to describe this is as the part of me that I want others to see and pay attention to (...) so you don't see my dark side! (laughter). I think I'm a bit possessed. No I think I mean obsessed by it!'* (Y.50).

In this context, Facebook could be seen as an opportunity to anchor aspects of the self that the individual *chooses* to display to friends. For Eric it was important that his Profile Page and attendant information, 'feels real, and *is* real' (M.40). The web has offered a level of anonymity, where people can escape out of the 'real world' and transcend their offline networks and friends (McClimens and Gordon, 2008). What is unique about the sense of self reproduced across social media is that this remains tied to *known* friends, and anchored in a real world context. The attitude that, 'There's no

point having a fake Profile' (Y.34) as Joe and others have mentioned earlier, confirms this viewpoint. Hence profile presence is both distinctively individual *and* at the same time, intimately incorporated within the encounters shared with others. To view social media as new opportunities for the outlet of *expression*, rather than as 'domains' for new identities is to uncover the subtle interplay between the construction of profile presence and interaction techniques. Livingstone (2008b) views this as a 're-setting', which she describes as a, 'risky opportunity' in the lives of 'young teenagers'. Livingstone (2008b: 393) goes on to note a 'puzzled dismay' regarding a generation that has 'many friends but little sense (...) with self-display'. From this perspective, I suggest that Livingstone (2008b), and other social researchers who confine their analysis to SNSs offer a narrow perspective. Consequently their depiction of 'social identity' is highly 'stylistic', 'elaborate' and formed on the basis of interactions related to one SNS and present *only* within this setting (e.g. Livingstone, 2008b). While the age of participants in such research may be a factor their behaviour has been influential in how people view sociability and SNSs. My position as an ethnographer, and a part of the research participants' networks, has meant that the expression of my own identity shares much with the participant's way of behaving, interactions and utilisation of different aspects of social media. Indeed, during the course of the research there was a noticeable shift from 'just Facebook networks' (M.GP.2.i) used, to the inclusion of other applications, and network resources. My original discussion with Arnos that took place in a focus group at the University of Melbourne was followed up in a later Facebook message exchange. Arnos viewed the use of other social media resources as something that,

> *'just happened. A bit like when Facebook first started (...) you upload a new*
> *application on Facebook and it ties you to your friends who use the same one.*
> *Like all my friends started to use Twitter, now I do too'* (M.GP.2.i).

154

I have already referred to Facebook as an opportunity to anchor aspects of the self. This approach is concerned with the way individuals shape and re-shape their Profile in the light of information flows across social media. Instead of being a 'user' of social media, profile presence is part of the emergent social properties that develop with repeated engagement and interactions with friends. In response to a follow-up message on Facebook about the research, Clifford explained how he had 'grown' to view Facebook as,

> 'something I take everywhere with me. When you think about it, it is quite odd isn't it? I mean it's you, and it's not you. My older brother now works at the BBC and uses Facebook more than I do now, and you know how much that is! (…) I don't see him much though (…) but his Profile is so him (…) it's even got his baby pictures on it! (…) there's like your whole life up there for people to see' (Y.31).

Clifford's account sits in contrast to the postmodern visualisation of an 'unreal' and 'disembodied' construct of the self referred to in Turkle's (1995) and Stone's (1995) work on MUDs. Rather than offering 'adventure narratives' and possibilities of multiple and unbounded selves, on Facebook participants felt a heightened responsibility to make sure that they 'look' right and are anchored in the real. The postmodern selves of the 1990s writers would quickly lose 'kudos' and value if such attempts were made to set up a similarly styled profile presence. Early in the data collection, William identified how it was desirable to have a Profile Page that was 'the same as me' (M.37). In addition, William described how he felt that it was a, 'waste of time to put up false information, or make yourself out to be something that you're not. You're going to get found out, you know' (M.37). It is here that we return to the importance of the discrimination of information and judgement of friends as either, 'real' or 'fake' (M.37). Whilst Turkle's (1995) respondents celebrated fragmentation, and freedom from corporeal bonds, for the young people included in this study, what is valued is the bringing together known networks of friends, which inevitably contain real elements of social lives and the self.

155

Talking in a focus group at the University of York, Gemma referred to her 'gradual realisation' that her Profile Page was seen as a 'new part of me' (Y.Gp.3.ii). Like others in the group she had shared a sense of the creativity and reinvention involved with the setting up of her Profile Page. Another participant in the group, Sam went on to explain,

> 'My Profile Page is a part of me. It's hard to describe, it is a created thing, and a what (pause), but its also a part of an established identity. You can laugh at that, but this is the current way of doing things. It's like branding and reinventing yourself all over again' (Y.Gp.3.i).

Gemma and Sam's discussion captures the growing consciousness about the significance and purposeful intention of profile presence. This consciousness can take the form of the decision to display information on a Profile Page, and the interpretation and act of observing social actions on friend's pages. Thus, an exclusive form of mutuality is implicated when one individual is linked to another. Each interactant can assess the other's Facebook Profile and adjust their actions to fit the evaluation of this image. This is in the full knowledge that the other may already be working through an identical set of interpretative processes. These processes are centred on the *display* of the self, which are discussed in the next section.

6.2 Second element: The display of a 'brand image'

As noted in chapter five, time and care is taken to create a Profile Page on Facebook. Once the students had joined Facebook they started to use other social media where this 'simple' profile takes on new meaning and significance. To return to Joe and Arnos, they both shared a sense of how 'Friends on Facebook just lead you onto other things' (Y.34). Here, 'you see what your friends are doing. You take notice of how they look (...) you're like 'yeah that's cool, I want to use that too' (M.GP.2.i). At this stage, there is a value in the display and image of the self. Writing about youth and SNSs, boyd (2007) and Livingstone (2008b) make note of the opportunity to

'conduct the psychological task of adolescence', where the individual is as a user who 'constructs' and 'experiments' with their identity. Experimentation is certainly an element of social media interactions and the development of a Profile as Claire describes,

> *'I like to play around with the look of my Profile. Especially since you can have add-ons, but it's also important for me to keep it looking real. Not too like MySpace!' (Y.7).*

However, when pressed, during our interview, as to whether Claire meant that she had 're-invented' herself, she was quick to point out,

> *'it's not about reinvention. You can't hide the real you. It's more about putting the best part of yourself forward. You know that your friends are going to be looking, so its important they see you at your best. A bit like putting your make-up on in the morning. I wouldn't leave the house without my mascara on, and I also wouldn't have an ugly looking Profile on Facebook' (Y.7).*

The idea of the self as 'constructed' was an integral part of Claire's awareness for how she used Facebook and in-turn relates to her sense of self. She describes how she views this process as, 'A bit like putting your make-up on in the morning' (Y.7). This suggests a model of social media that for Claire is already fixed within daily patterns of routine activity, such as the putting on of her make-up. More importantly this can be seen as one of the ritual aspects of the self, underpinned by the *moments* when we prepare to present ourselves to others (Goffman, 1963). Taken from this perspective, Claire's profile presence is an essential part of her sense of self and anchored, as Gemma noted earlier as, 'a new part of me' (Y.Gp.3.i). Following Mead (1934) the sense of preparation that Claire, and others, put in place is a continuous and reflexively driven process. Taken as part of daily sets of social practices, both Claire's and Gemma's relation with how they use Facebook can be cast as work on the self (Giddens, 1991). Meaning is thus conceived as an organised display of image that is shared with others and which relates to the connections into which the individual deliberately enters into. In this way a Profile is in a sense *branded* as a form of social identity, which is formed in relation to others and any social act that gives

meaning to the information that is displayed. This construct of the self is important when we imagine how the processes of the Profile is essential to the set of social relations that are put in place by the individual. Indeed, as Lury (2004: 1) writing about the brand as a new media object notes, 'this is not simply an 'either here or somewhere else, but rather is a some-thing that emerges in parts'. The suggestion that is being developed here is that this branded identity is not fixed in terms of a consistent and standard image, rather it is a pattern of activity intended to replicate a presence in the minds and actions of others. Whilst intangible, it would be a mistake to view this perspective of self as a 'reformulation' that is born out of an individualised 'crisis' (cf. Giddens, (1991). A more appropriate interpretation is to view this as an 'openness' and *extension* of, 'the best part of yourself' (Y.7). This shares much with Lury's (2004: 2) notion of the 'object of possibility'. I am not suggesting that profile presence should be viewed as an object, but rather how this suggests a reformulation of self-image as a celebration and embracement of possibilities. At this stage, care also needs to be taken not to over-emphasise the state of such possibilities, where the sense of the real must always underpin the components of profile image.

There are similarities between Claire's analogy about make-up with Goffman's (1963) assertion that people prepare themselves in a similar fashion to take on particular interactive roles. In this view, again the image that is being created is not fixed, but constantly being created, and recreated. Russ, mentioned that he felt his Profile Page and 'image on Facebook' felt 'like a brand' (Y.29); he later elaborated,

> *'because I do drama I'm quite theatrical, or 'poncy' as my friends say, and so like to sush-up my Profile with a bit of vava voom! You know, a good-looking picture and complimentary bits and pieces (...) like on my Wall, I always make sure I have nice quotes from friends, no swearing! Only joking! But I keep it clean looking, so not too many applications or add-ons (...) so people know it's the real me' (Y.29).*

Russ's vision of himself as 'theatrical' and the display of a 'clean looking' Profile Page represent deliberately put in place 'signs', which are intended for others to build up the 'right' impression about him (Y.29). In addition, these signs can be seen to be as much about the display of Russ to his friends, as the image that he has of himself. Indeed, we can recast Russ's observations as a form of impression management and as a performance of identity – particularly when he refers to his 'theatrical' nature (Goffman, 1963). This resonates with the idea that profile presence should be viewed as a continuous and *social* process. Here the inherently social conditions of Facebook allow for the construction, and reconstruction, of a digital profile, which can be manifest across more than one social media resource. Mead (1934) provides a theorisation of the self, in relation to what it means to *be* social and to *participate* in social action (Jackson, forthcoming). In essence the self is manifest within our 'social experiences' and the relationships that we share with others. Indeed, as Mead (1934: 152) reminds us,

> 'It is in the form of the generalised other that the social process influences the behaviour of the individuals involved in it and carrying it on (...) it is in this form that the social process or community enters as a determining factor in the individual's thinking'.

In this way, the 'self-conscious' engagement that Russ refers to when creating his Profile is with reference to 'any particular other individuals' (his friends), and the image that he has of himself (Mead, 1934: 152). For Mead (1934: 138 - 40) this is crucial to the conceptual pairing of the 'I' and 'Me', where the individual is always aware of the 'other'. Mead argues,

> 'The individual experiences himself as (an object), not directly, but only indirectly from the particular standpoints of other members of the same social group'.

Russ and Antonia's accounts show an awareness of the information and *moment* when they choose to share such aspects of themselves with friends. In terms of the 'I' and the 'Me' it is important to acknowledge that this is a conjoined dialogical relationship. To follow from Mead (1934: 178) whilst,

The 'I' does not appear in the same sense in experience as does the 'me'. The "me" represents a definite organization of the community there in our own attitudes, and calling for a response.

Conceived in this way the 'I' is always fleeting, and a recondition of the 'Me' by memory. The construction of the Profile Page is similarly composed from memory and represents a definitive organisation of the self at that particular moment in time. This image is intended for the response of others as, 'You know that your friends are going to be looking' (Y.7).

If we link this construct to Russ's description of branding we can see how profile presence relates directly to the perception of the generalised other, and is a view of the self that has significant social value. In addition the symbolic meanings that make up such 'branded' identity shares much with what Lury (2004) has framed as 'performing production'. Lury's (2004: 57) view offers an 'inside out' of the complexities of brand production, where the 'brand artefact', 'adapts through continuous feedback and feed-forward'. The way that Russ and others view themselves is as an externalised image, characterised by their view of the self and corresponding actions. In the research context, we might view such self-image as dependent on the interface between the primary association of friend's assumptions about them and the generality of connections as a converged network. In effect, what is taking place we can label as 'brand management' (cf. Lury, 2004). Indeed, as Russ explains,

> 'how I look and what my friends think of my look is important. I play around with it too. One day I'll use a black and white shot that looks really professional. Next time I might change this to a out of focus shot, or baby picture, or something more surreal like my elbow (...) the shot's always of me' (Y.29).

In these terms, one is aware of the productive efforts of the individual and consumptive reactions of others. To return to Lury (2004: 63) evident from Russ's description is a relationship of *signs*, 'not of representation, but one of implication'. However, whilst not always being a 'true' representation (e.g.

160

the display of baby pictures), it is important to note that the representation of the image is true to the individual. We can refer back here to Joe's earlier concern that his Profile was 'not fake' (Y.7). Both Joe's and Russ's approach foregrounds their awareness of image. Here the presence of the self must be understood in relation to the strategic elements of their self-branding, and social identity, and could explain why Joe and others seek a distancing from the 'naff' and 'fake' look of SNSs like MySpace. This perspective is distinct from what some writers have framed as a 'digital double', or 'tele-presence' (e.g. Hillis, 1999; Mair, 1997), as there is a synergistic element to personal image and relations. For those like Joe and Russ such presence is not a 'twin', but seen 'already' as, 'a part of myself' (Y.29). Indeed, as Pamela stated at the beginning of the chapter, Facebook represents a 'way of being' (Y.50), a 'way' that is perceptible as it is emerges alongside encounters with others. From this point of view, self-image may be seen as both motivating type of interactional exchange with others, and at the same time offers a self-recursive feedback to the self. Hence the participants' 'way of being' and image across Facebook is organised by a dynamic communication between the social information of the self as producer, and friends as consumers. To carry the metaphor of the branded image further, this process describes a 'self-reflexive structure of circulation' and one that is 'built around some reciprocal social action' (Lee and LiPuma, 2002: 193). What is acknowledged here is the dynamic between the individual as a producer and manager of their self-image, and the consequent relationships that are developed with others through awareness of the self, manifest as a profile presence. Implicit within this dynamic is that there may be moments of both continuity and change, as these underpin the social participation with others, and the investment in profile presence. Thus, the image that Facebook and other social media reproduce enables the management of the self, and in doing so the connection to others.

I want to return to Claire's earlier comment about MySpace. Her concern that her page does not look 'too like MySpace' was a recurrent theme in the data. Recurrent is the sense that Claire's image is underpinned by her personal judgment of the self, which also contributes to the qualities she wants to promote to friends. Joe also referred to the 'cluttered' and 'fake' look of Profile Pages that could come across as 'too MySpacey' (Y.7). This is indicative of the amount of thought, and work, that goes into the creation and maintenance of profile presence, as what is, in effect, a branded image. In this way the sense of profile image contributes to a sense of personal ownership of the self, which is linked to the social relationships secured by the relative 'fixity' established on Facebook. The emphasis in other research has been on the analysis of one SNS, which is seen to produce a new identity that is fixed to that particular site (e.g. boyd, 2006b; 2006c, Livingstone, 2008b). This could mean that the 'experimentation' with identity that these writers refer to is more likely to take place on MySpace than Facebook. However, as Russ and other participant's actions show, there is evidence of such a play with image on Facebook. The focus on one SNS by boyd (2006b; 2006c) has shown how each SNS has its own 'tribe' and holds a different appeal in terms of user demographics (e.g. HitWise Report, 2007). For the participants in this study, this is not only about a particular population or group type, but marks the setting up of a distinct culture of social experience. The research participants represent a shift from the kind of 'restrictive' identity, or 'identity place', on one SNS, to a profile presence that is *reproduced* and *displayed* across other forms of social media. Thus, profile presence is neither static in terms of content, nor fixed only to one site, or one aspect of a site. This suggests a convergence of personal self-disclosure that is sustained *through* the use of social media. For example, Paul outlined how,

> *'for me it's not about making up stuff, its all real. It's the real me that you see, and I have real friends. I don't become someone else when I log into Facebook*

(...) and it's not about making up a new me. I am me, my Profile is me (...) and it's the same me you meet on Twitter and Flickr' (Y.47).

From a Meadian perspective, it is worth acknowledging the repetition of 'me' from Paul's discussion. All the students who participated in the interviews, and focus group sessions, made mention to the 'realness' and 'likeness' of their Profile Page. To describe this display, the words 'look' and 'feel' were recurrent in the data, and it was important that a Profile Page had the 'right' look, and scanned, or 'read', well when observed by friends (Y.47; M.32). There are a number of ways to understand what is taking place here, and these were issues that I chose to pursue on my blog (see figure 6.ii, overleaf) with a post entitled, 'Are you a made-over perfectly pixalated princess, or made-under gloriously geeky gimp?'[62] (mh).

Figure 6.ii Extract from Facebook Etiquette blog, 'Are you a made-over perfectly pixalated princess, or made-under gloriously geeky gimp?'

MONDAY, JUNE 2, 2008

Are you a made-over perfectly pixalated princess, or made-under gloriously geeky gimp?

Unshaven, achingly handsome and 'best taste' black and white portfolio shot is the best description of my friend Mr M lets call him, profile picture. As a self-made man, upstarter (not in the conflict and angry sense, but in the business world) his image (updated frequently with same self-styled intensity since you ask) purveys an air of incredible power, authority and control. His pose says 'I'm relaxed, approachable and self-assured', and as his eyes look yearningly into the distance it's not hard to speculate the rate his intellect is constantly churning over. That or he's been mesmerised by a squirrel. Either way its compelling and works.

Compared to another of my other friends profile shot; Ms C is an equal as pouted to 'perfection', but instead her 'come hither eyes' leaves a more vacant expression than lasting impression.

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[62] *http://properfacebooketiquette.blogspot.com/2008/06/are-you-made-over-perfectly-pixalated.html*.

In the post I offered two styles of Profile, the first was set by an 'Unshaven, achingly handsome and 'best taste' black and white portfolio shot', compared to the 'veiled, fake looking (...) pouted to 'perfection'', and with "come hither eyes' which provides a more vacant expression than lasting impression' (Monday, 2 June 2008). From the comments, one response disclosed,

> 'Anonymous said...
>
> 'To add to the mix a friend of mine had her images photo-shopped - such vanity but if you gather only virtual people maybe it does not matter" (4:29 PM, 8 June 2008).

My own reply was as follows,

> 'Miss Maz Hardey said...
>
> 'Never confuse 'knock out' with 'knock-off', your friends are your friends and they will know if you post a falsie, or display falsies. Yes you know what I mean' (6:34 PM, 8 June 2008).

This highlights the collective awareness of identity markers, and how the display of false, or unreal identities are 'inappropriate' within such settings. SNSs, therefore offer another way of 'fixing' identity and accompanying social relations. For Mead (1934: 47) the 'internalisation in our experience of the external conversations of gestures (...) carry on with other individuals in the social process'. In this way the, always retrospective, form of profile image 'arouses' social meaning as a deliberate social act, 'like putting on your make-up' (Y.7), or unconscious replication of the self, 'it's not about making up a new me' (Y.47).

In the popular press SNSs have been given a 'bad name', where they are seen as over-stylised statements to act out teenage egos, 'Facebook is bad for you!' (Charlesworth, 2008). Wiehl (2008) reports for FoxNews, 'Girls Just Want to Have Fun! Not a Life in Prison!' SNSs are described as the 'bathroom wall of my day', where, 'Rumours about what's been happening among teens are spread in gossip blogs and are fuelled through websites that hasten the process'. Livingstone (2008b: 403) refers to the idea of the 'embellishment' of identity that may be 'elaborated' on SNSs. For the participants it was

important that Profile Pages were as 'real', and 'clean' as possible (Y.47).
Sue commented that she did not 'want anything fancy or silly looking' on her
Profile, and again comparisons with MySpace were made, 'looks too
MySpace' (Y.35). My argument is that the interconnectedness of the profile
presence is reinforced, as individuals continued to update and observe one
another's actions and image. In this respect there is a need to readjust to the
social setting of the moment, to achieve a consistent and coherent presence
of actions and image on Facebook. This is crucial, because as Mead (1934)
has argued, the possibilities afforded by the subject, 'I', and the 'Me' of the
generalised other, are aligned with the display of the norms of identity and
social setting of the self. From this point of view profile presence may be
seen as a requirement of the self to promote social participation and
encounters between individuals. This emerges in relation to the interactivity
with others, connected to the revealed aspects of the self. For the research
participants this was not about seeking attention, or a narcissistic
presentation as proposed by Buffardi and Campbell's (2008) rather narrow
perspective of Facebook Profiles, but a replication of the recognised aspects
of the self, and already established relations with others. Indeed as Paul
mentioned earlier, 'It's the real me that you see, and I have real friends. I
don't become someone else when I log into Facebook' (Y.47).

Paul's comment about the display of 'the real me (...) I am me, my Profile is
me' (Y.47), may on first reading seem to foreground a self-absorbed, mind-
set (cf. Buffardi and Campbell, 2008). Certainly, as Livingstone (2008a;
2008b) has commented there are elements of a 'me, me, me' culture on SNSs.
However, a closer re-reading reveals this conception to be more complex.
The personalisation of Facebook and the links to friends mean that the most
important values across social media are formed in association, and attention
to the awareness of others. Whilst these all link back to 'Me', this does not
necessarily mean that this about a domination of this aspect of self. Indeed, it
is as likely that this allows for the evaluation of others and orientation across

the social setting of Facebook. In the same interview I asked Paul, 'So is Facebook *just* all about you?' Paul replied,

> *'Well obviously my Profile is all about me. But things would get boring pretty quickly if that's all I was doing on Facebook! (...) so it's more about my friends, what they are up to (...) and it allows me to be able to respond to them (...) they can see me and get hold of me'* (Y.47).

The display of identity is evidently not fixed and is constantly made, and remade, in light of the information and encounters that take place in daily life. Roland explains how initially his 'very basic page' developed and took on this dynamic aspect as it became important to him to ensure that his display was 'up-to-date' (Y.45). The display of personal information can appear as, 'different', 'fun' and at times even 'pointless' on Facebook. However, the content is important for the user and necessary for social interaction. Indeed, once Roland had set up his Facebook account he wanted to,

> *'use it to check in with friends, see what's going on. The same as you do everyday anyway. Facebook is just another way to stay in touch (...) and it's a fun way to check out what's happening too'* (Y.45).

I was interested by Roland's accepted 'everyday' relationship with Facebook. As this had not always been the case, I wanted to delve deeper into Roland's motivation for using Facebook and the ways in which he had set up his Profile Page in the initial phases of use. Roland reflected that,

> *'I'm so used to Facebook it's funny to think of it not being there, or not having an account. Way back when I first joined (in October 2006) I only had a very basic Page. I was just experimenting at that time, so didn't really invest any of myself into it (...) it was a spur of the moment thing, I didn't really think much about it at the time. Just that all my friends were using it, so I thought I should too. But then I got addicted. I mean really addicted. So I spend quite a bit of time making sure that my Profile is up-to-date and looks good (...) it (his Profile) stands for who you are (...) so it's a part of me, and that part that can be easily seen'* (Y.45).

166

From Roland's discussion, we can see how his display of information was led by a period of adjustment, 'I was just experimenting at that time' (Y.45) he describes. Here such displays are an emergent product of social interaction. The importance of maintaining a dynamic profile is underscored by Simon's reflection and the way that this was difficult in the initial versions of Facebook. He noted,

> 'Facebook was crap at first. I mean compared to now. Now my page looks so much better, more like me. I don't go into all that re-setting and playing around with too many applications, but it is slick looking (...) my friends love it!' (Y.54).

The very process of setting up a Profile Page has implicit within the action the expectation and judgement of friends. Here, in Meadian terms, there is a development from the 'I', to the profile presence of the 'Me' as a reflexive process within an interactional and public space. In essence, this is about a, 'writing in' and 'about' the self that parallels an autobiographical script. Within this context, Sophie claimed that she,

> 'finds it hard to put Facebook down. You spend all that time writing into it, suddenly your friends can know all about you (...) it took me by surprise when one friend I had not been in touch with for ages messaged me to say she had been to the same holiday camp as me. Another friend had put pictures up on her Profile from years ago of our first holiday away together and had tagged me. Then Sallyanne messaged me to say she had been there too! That was so funny, and to make that connection was just so random. That probably wouldn't have happened without Facebook' (Y.13).

Sophie's description of how, 'hard' it was to, 'put Facebook down' (Y.13), indicates a progression from the scripting of the self in terms of the action of writing and uploading of content onto the site, to the incorporation of interactions and encounters with friends. In this way the individual is more than the 'sum' of their Profile Page - across social media information can arrive from unexpected sources as a tagged photo uploaded by a mutual friend. The profile presence is scripted by the alignment of all these seemingly 'random' sources of information, as well as the ways in which the

software 'anticipates' or 'offers up' snapshots of actions as they converge together as gathered encounters in the News and MiniFeeds. There are overlaps here with a Meadian perspective of a conscious awareness of the self. This can be best seen when students first Joined Facebook. Francis described this kind of engagement as,

> 'a bit like writing a diary, you know you're writing about yourself. That's the closest way that I can describe it really. So it's like a diary, but not as close as that cos you know other people are going to read it (...) so its everything about you' (M.4).

For the research participants the capacity to be able to recall from memory aspects of themselves and to write these onto Facebook represent a consciously engaged and reflexive process that can be described as 'semi-autobiographical'. For example, when I first signed to Facebook in October 2005, how the information was collected and displayed on my Profile Page followed a tightly scripted protocol, like filling in the 'personal background' section of *curriculum vitae*. The information followed a linear pattern, with information about my college and university, as well as descriptions of the most recent jobs that I had held. For a new user first Joining Facebook the site prompts for 'basic' background that includes education, work, relationship status and so on. These are stratified by a temporally displayed context, e.g. period at college, followed by period at university. In addition the News and MiniFeeds and Wall posts show the date and time of actions. By entering in and observing this type of information display, the participants configured their own 'stories' of the self, which also offered a reading of the accounts of others. In essence, encounters are based on the ability of the individual to recall and reproduce information on Facebook, as well as their imagination to piece together snapshots from friends. Indeed, as both the research participants and myself have chosen to display our information, we have had to acknowledge a temporal contextualisation for these series of actions. This includes the moment of the event, the context of the sharing of the information when uploaded to a site, and the moment(s)

when we go back over and re-read such displays of content. The information may be described as 'autobiographical' because it provides an account of ourselves that we envisage being true. At the same time, the account can only ever be *semi*autobiographical as friends link, tag and comment on the same display of information, and piece together the same stories in their own way. For example, uploading pictures of a wedding the individual has in their mind the activities of the day, and tag, and order, the images accordingly. Other friends may share a different version of events, and read the sequence in a different flow. Mead (1934: 174) also notes this temporality, when he describes how,

> 'I talk to myself, and I remember what I said and perhaps the emotion content that went with it. The "I" of this moment is present in the "me" of the next moment. I cannot turn around quick enough to catch myself'.

In the same way, the self cannot be 'caught' in the moment of interaction across social media. Whilst messages, images etc can be recorded and may appear as static within a social network, these only represent a fleeting moment in time, and consequently another sequence in the flow of social information (cf. Lash, 2002). In this context, the same sense of experience can never recur exactly as it did before, precisely because the moment has already passed, and the situation changed. How we arrive at a fixivity of the self is always in association with others and the active work on the self by the individual. Thus, profile presence cannot be established without shared associations and displays of social encounters with others. Maria, felt,

> *'well I wouldn't even be on Facebook if it weren't for my friends. Or I'd be very lonely if I was! (...) you can tell who's, who. Everyone has their own style. It's all personalised to you,'* (M.9).

As summed up by Maria there is a dual function to the Profile that contains elements of everyone's 'own style' and at the same time is, 'all personalised to you' (M.9). As Mead (1934) has pointed out, the form and social processes, which relate to the generalised other, provide an of-the-moment

mobilisation of a socially constituted self (Jackson 2007; forthcoming). To follow the autobiographic metaphor, it is worthwhile to turn briefly to a more literary interpretation, where there can only ever be one 'author'. It is in this context that as the literary writer Davenport (1977: 146) reminds us, consists of the author's 'aesthetic will, and the grist he needs for his work'. In the same essay, Davenport (1977: 147) goes on to describe the role of autobiography as 'a vacuum: nothing until it is filled'. Part of the task of the Profile is to fill this void, both in terms of the self as envisaged by the individual and the way in which they may perceive that s/he are displayed to friends. Essentially, this is about the amalgamation of the 'essence' of the individual, made up of the display of text, images and actions across social media.

Talking in a focus group, Ross commented how, 'my Profile is all my own work. I'm proud of that. Me, by me. How do you like that?!' (Y.Gp.6.i). I mentioned earlier, with reference to Jackson (2007; forthcoming), how the Profile can only ever be a, 'of-the-moment' and socially produced constituent. Ross is proud of his 'me work', where his conception of 'Me, by me', is his 'own work' (Y.Gp.6.i). Such information is part of an ongoing, reflexive and persistent display of his Profile. Ross's rhetorical question, 'How do you like that?' (Y.Gp.6.i), reflects the implied acknowledgement of the role of others as a part of his reflexive engagement. In one sense Ross's question is directed to others in the focus group, as well as (in a metaphorical sense) his friends on Facebook, to judge whether they do indeed 'like that' (Y.Gp.6.i). Hence whilst there is room for (semi) autobiographical reflection, this is only in conjunction with awareness of, what Lois acknowledged in the same focus group session as, 'what everyone else is up to' (Y.Gp.6.iii).

During the course of the research, the participants, like myself, were in a constant state of writing, re-writing, reading and re-reading of the self across Facebook. As I have already tried to suggest, this process is measured by a

temporal arrangement. Here, remembered actions can share the same 'present' space on a page, e.g. on a Profile, in a Facebook Photo Album, and at the same time can take on new contexts, e.g. when tagged and commented on by friends, or displayed in the News and MiniFeeds. It is this kind of temporal shifting, where events, actions and friends can occupy the same instance, and also relates to a new context, which shapes the sense of the profile presence. Elizabeth envisaged this as a 'intermingling' of who she was, and what she was doing. She mentioned,

> 'Facebook is about everything. So from my Profile you get a sense of who I am, and who my friends are. Now with the Feeds and Status updates, hey its likely that you know what I'm doing as I'm doing it (...) it (Facebook) paints a picture of who I am and where I am' (Y.46).

Elizabeth's reference to the ways in which Facebook 'paints a picture', was the inspiration for thinking about how the profile presence is in effect like a 'portrait' of the self. Instead of Cooley's (1902) concept of a 'Looking glass self', the portrait of the self is about the *reproduction* of image, character, reputation and the *most* distinctive qualities of the self. These are envisaged by the individual and can then be *painted* across social media. Thus, the portrait is never complete, and like a gallery picture can be viewed and interpreted in different ways. As the 'artist' this demands a reflexive engagement, willingness to paint, and display of the portrait, which is fundamental to the sense of profile presence. Such action was the inspiration for the post (see figure 6.iii, overleaf), 'Who's the nudist of them all?[63]' (mh).

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[63] http://properfacebooketiquette.blogspot.com/2008/07/whos-nudist-of-them-all.html

Figure 6.iii Extract from Facebook Etiquette blog, 'Who's the nudist of them all?'

TUESDAY, JULY 8, 2008
Who's the nudist of them all?

My parents are nudists and caused much hilarity by posting
some modest photos on Facebook after their last hol.
Unfortunately they also tagged me in the pictures. Now all
my friends have had much hilarity at my expense, and I
feel a little over-exposed. How do I recover my cool
Facebook image from such embarrassment?

The purpose of Facebook is to 'make connections to those
around you'. Well yes that's all very nice, but there's
also some 'cool tools' and trouble shooting that one
should be aware of. It is all very well being wrapped
around interactivity, but what point if you do not know
what you're doing, or have any notion as to the potential
consequences of your actions.

The post described a common concern that had also occurred from the
interview and focus group data, about how friends may interpret various
displays of information on Facebook. In this scenario the dilemma from the
blog outlined how,

> *'My parents are nudists and caused much hilarity by posting some modest
> photos on Facebook after their last hol. Unfortunately they also tagged me in
> the pictures. Now all my friends have had much hilarity at my expense, and I
> feel a little over-exposed. How do I recover my cool Facebook image from such
> embarrassment?'* (Tuesday, 8 July 2008).

To continue the metaphor, the opportunity to 'paint in' a particular image
shares accents with some of the more recent accounts of the self as
conceptualised by Giddens (1990), Lash (1994) and Beck and Beck-
Gernsheim (1995). This type of reflexive 'self-project' is borne out of a sense
of crisis due to the loss of the 'rigid boundaries' of modernity and the
'liberation' of identity. Hence for Giddens 'we have no choice but to choose

how to be and how to act' (Giddens 1994: 75). Other writers like Livingstone (2008b) and boyd (2006c; 2007) have used this 're-writing' of the self, which is seen as part of the technological shaping of social practices on SNSs. I take a different approach. Where Castells' (1996) 'network society' arguably left 'floating' the possibilities of identity and social interaction, the actions of the research participants suggest a contrasting set of social dilemmas, which are fixed to established norms and known social values. This sense of fixing of the self and associated social interactions was also realised through my own encounters. Indeed, as a co-participant involved in the same networks, the opportunity for a reflexive and analytic judgement of both my own and others' interactions became a necessary social procedure in order to replicate my identity and reproduce friend connections. This can be framed as an *inherently social* act and is discussed in more detail in the next section.

6.3 Third element: inherently social

The participants in the study recognise that they have a new set of choices when using social media. Rebecca observed, 'it's like writing an address book, just with more detail than the names and addresses of friends, you also have other information that's about them too' (Y.8). Just 'like writing an address book' (Y.8), there is a deliberate decision process about who to include, how to arrange information (e.g. by name, surname, nick-name, etc) that will fill the content of the book. Let us refer to this as a form of 'autobiographical social-accounting', which reproduces the known friendship groups and connections, and can be recorded because, as Rebecca goes on to say, these friends, 'are ours' (Y.8). Thus during the process of writing, or painting the self across social media, we move from an autobiographical reflection, as authored by the individual, to autobiography as a social story and construct. In this way part of the story of the self is intended as a device for capturing friends' attention and facilitating other encounters. The autobiographical elements of the profile presence provide a display of the self to friends, and at the same time merges behavioural actions from the

past and present (e.g. the display of images in the Facebook Album that occupy the same space, but may have a different social and historic context). There is a sense here of the work of the self, which whilst allowed to fade into the background, offers a core stability for the re-telling of the self across social media. For example, Rebecca described how, 'I'm always playing around with what's on my Profile (...) everything is real to me and is seen by my friends' (Y.8). Thus, whilst 'at play', this is only in terms of the features or brand elements to display, rather than a play on her identity (cf. Turkle, 1995). As an ongoing process, this is not individualistic in the same way as Giddens's (1991) project of the self, but represents a sequence of moments when the individual may be engaged in the reproduction of different aspects of themselves. Indeed, to return to Gemma's description where she described how the display of her Profile Page was 'A bit like putting your make-up on in the morning' (Y.7), here her sense of image is always relational as she is careful to avoid an 'ugly' Profile image. The metaphor of putting on make-up is appropriate here, when we consider how an individual may both routinely have a certain way that they put on make-up, as well as other practices depending on the situation. Thus, I am critical of Giddens's (1991) model of individualisation, as meaning is given to profile presence only in terms of the association with others, and an awareness of the relations with others. For Gemma her concern about an 'ugly' Profile is because of the relational aspects of the self which are carried across to her friends. In this regard the configuration of 'who' Gemma presents herself to be is fixed by the construct of her own image and how this is reinforced by her friends. Rebecca takes up this theme when she mentioned how,

> *'I'm not vain, just more aware of how I come across. It's not a looks thing, but more about how my friends feel about me that's the most important thing to me'* (Y.8).

For Rebecca her Profile is more than purely a looks-based model of the self, but is envisaged as a social platform as an indirect discourse with others. Here the sense that it is 'more about how my friends feel about me' (Y.8) is

174

central to the value that Rebecca has of herself. Indeed part of Gemma's awareness of her social construct is through such 'introspective self-consciousness' (Mead, 1913: 374), or the way that she consciously calls or displays attention about herself. This very process forms the basis for the sense of profile presence, which I suggest, like the 'Me', is 'the object of the social conduct of others' (Mead, 1913: 375).

Here there is renewed emphasis on the act of the *introspection* of elements of the self in order to enter into social action (cf. Mead, 1913). As I have suggested, this is organised to produce a branded image of the self, which one presents to others. It is through this presentation that the connection to known others takes on significance as they act as the 'guarantee' of reproduction of the self, which must be seen to be *real*. We can describe this as analogous to an, 'autobiographical self-accounting', where participants are always seeking to 'be real', and 'not fake' (Y.34). Indeed, the very act of maintaining a Profile Page is to impart personal information, and provide a social context for social connections as a part of profile presence. Christopher spoke of 'being able to say things about me, but also about my friends' (Y.28). In this way the profile presence is an emergent product of social action, which overtly links the self to friends. Talking in a focus group with five others, James described,

> *'I hope I give off the right impression on Facebook. It can be difficult because I know the image that I want to give, but are my friends getting the same message? (...) I already know who I am, so it's not a new me, but the same me as always and ever on my Profile'* (M.Gp.5.iii).

I wanted the group to discuss this sense of the right impression in more detail, and talking after James, Kate explained, 'my Profile relates to me, as you all know here. So for me my Profile is as real as me sat here. Wouldn't you guys say?' (M.Gp.5.iv).

Beverly expanded on Kate's explanation further, admitting that she,

'wouldn't be so hooked on Facebook anyway if it was all so unreal and virtual. I'm addicted because it is real, and shows who we are as friends. I just want to say I love everyone's Profile here! (laughing)' (M.Gp.5.iv).

From James, Kate and Beverly's comments it is clear that what is valued from profile presence is that it provides representations of interactions by known others and shared social norms and values. Instead of building up a 'new life' away from 'rigid' and 'prescribed' social boundaries (Beck and Beck-Gersheim, 1995: 6), the participants viewed these as stable influences, where in effect they *want* to paint themselves within such frames. From this perspective, to counter Giddens (1994) notion of an uncertain self, the same users of social media will *continue* to paint by numbers, and always try to stay within the lines. This construct offers a different perspective from Adam's (2003: 223) use of a similar metaphor, where he argues how 'The individual is no longer painting by numbers (...) she is creating her own work of art'. The role of agency in this process is central to Gidden's (1994) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) argument about the construction of identity. I suggest a different approach where, whilst identity may be seen to be actively organised by the individual, this remains ordered and underpinned by established social positions. Rather than the 'release' from 'rigid' and 'prescribed' social roles and identifiers (cf. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) individuals seek to recreate and extend these across social media to organise their own autobiographies as a profile presence.

Framed by autobiographical information, an important aspect of profile presence is the way that this provides information that is of (and in) *the moment.* For Beck (1992) the 'detraditionalisation' of social practices creates a sense of crisis, and as a result the individual is responsible for putting in place a new set of social identifiers. Both Castells (1997) and Giddens (1994) relate to this sense of destabilisation where the individual is seen to be 'highly rational' and 'calculating' in their transformation of identity. Perceived in this way the self is 'reflexive' and representational of 'how to be

and how to act' (Giddens, 1994: 75). Once again autonomy and control lie at the heart of such organisational techniques, as the individual appears to be in a state of always recovering from a crisis of the self. Such transformative processes of production are not relevant to the profile presence. Indeed as Kate's above comment in the focus group above shows, her use of Facebook is anything but abstract, as 'it is *real*' (M.Gp.5.iv). To put this more concretely the reciprocity that defines interactions also helps to secure and fix in place the self. This is more than just the display of the self, but a sophisticated production of social meaning underpinned by relations with others, and presence across network(s).

There is here a new set of social obligations, which are measured by the endless task of *having* to keep hold of, 'what everyone else is up to'[64] (mh) and how this reflects back onto the self. Such dilemmas inspired the blog post of the same title, 'what everyone else is up to' (see figure 6.iv, overleaf).

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64 http://properfacebooketiquette.blogspot.com/2008/04/more-friends-than-sense.html

Figure 6.iv Extract from Facebook Etiquette blog, 'What everyone else is up to'

SUNDAY, APRIL 27, 2008

What everyone else is up to

The newsfeed is nice, but do i *have* to keep track of what
all my friends are up to?

Hmm I'm checking out my friends updates now… reading
between the lines of various relationship status changes
from 'single' to 'in a relationship', as well as posted
items and tagged photos. Of course without all this
'essential' social information I'd be doing what with my
Sunday? Setting my own status and inflicting some more
blog posts on my Facebook friends :-D

I'm aware that to venture out exclusively in the company
of Facebook friends is to bear the markers of a socially
immersed (and possibly obsessed) set of social protocols.
There is the flip side to your keeping up with friends
dilemma and that is to ignore all updates. They're
transient and probably less than interesting anyway. This
seems marginally preferable to convincing oneself that
there is a marked interest when one of your Facebook
friends goes from 'single' to 'its complicated'. Although
you may have a more generous social impulse to engage with
friend events and actions: But isn't that just the
Facebook way when you find yourself immersed within a set
of social information and criteria that you previously
didn't care about, but suddenly seems most interesting AND
important.

Thus, profile presence is always engaged with the social and reflects the way
the research participants do not make a distinction in terms of the value of
interactions on Facebook and what in another context might be classified as
a more 'real' social setting away from the screen (cf. Turkle, 1995). We move
then, from the more 'standardised' parts of the Profile (e.g. age, sex,
university, etc), to personalised expression (e.g. likes and dislikes,
information from third party applications etc) and toward the collective and
social dimensions of profile presence. This movement is represented by two

comments received in light of the above blog post, where the 'Anonymous' readers observed,

> *'Anonymous said...*
>
> *I got obsessed with updates of relationships in my 3rd year at U. Everyone was in and out of single and in and I felt totally out of the scene'* (Anonymous, 6:53 AM, 28 April 2008).

Another anonymous poster observed,

> *'Anonymous said...*
>
> *I had a "real" conversation with a friend tonight and the whole subject of not being honest and frank came up: I don't lie about things. If I lie and someone buys it I lose respect for that person, which is self-fulfilling. I have to be honest. Which becomes a habit which makes you a bad liar...*
>
> *Anyway, I am selective about what I put down but these people are my friends - if I'm not honest why bother! Ditto with my friends - though I guess I already know who I trust...'* (Anonymous, 11:26 PM, 29 April 2008).

Both sets of comments focus on how information is displayed and interpreted by friends, which are seen as an intrinsic and social part of using social media. For the second anonymous reader, who views such actions as being either 'honest', or a 'lie', this is reflective of the self-sorting of social information. Giddens (1990) was writing at a time when there was a focus on the opening up of identity and potential project of the self, today individuals move through very different sets of social spaces. In this instance, the evaluation and image of the self is foregrounded by pre-determined social characteristics, such as who is friends with whom, and identifying markers, such as sex, hair colour, build etc. Where there may be incidences when individuals seem to be trying to escape or move outside of such parameters with the display of a cartoon profile image or baby picture, these identifiers are part of the brand of the self and replication of a specific social presence. This takes us from profile presence, to the types of encounters that mark anticipated social behaviour. I frame such issues in my

blog as social 'etiquette', the effect of which I discuss as *'presence techniques'* in the next chapter.

6.4 Conclusion

The process of profile presence is situated by the very choices of the students when they first Joined Facebook. Unique to these young people is the way in which they built up their own networks, and become friends with one another at a similar time. Indeed, the success of Facebook owes much to the ability of those who, like the participants in this study, have invested time in 'getting to grips' with 'being social' in such a manner. Two trends dominated the arrangement of profile presence in this chapter. On the one side, there is a need for the individual to put in place the 'public face' of the personal aspects of the self as a branded image. Initially this was composed for the Profile Page, but also came to include encounters and connections with known others. In another way, the profile presence is accompanied by a growing awareness about the participation, visibility and obligations that are arranged across social media. However, rather than being a product of 'too many' choices, that are without an answer, the participants 'felt secure', as they already had in place the measure of their own networks, which were based on pre-established friendship links. Here there is a fixivity of the self as a reflexive dynamic within the flow of information from and about others. Moreover, because of how Facebook was first set up (and continues today) to show 'basic' or standardised information about friends (e.g. name, sex, relationship status etc.), these young people found that with multiple choices, came corresponding answers. Thus the research participants can be viewed as 'modern subjects' or 'actors', where the opportunity to construct a 'new' self, and to celebrate 'new' relationships is safeguarded by reproduction and replication of known social processes. This is both in terms of the repetition of their real networks of friends and social information. Indeed, as this chapter has shown the self is 'not something ready made', but

subject to continuous revision in the light of information and the anticipated encounters with others (Dewey, 1916).

In the next chapter, we progress from Mead's conceptualisation of the self, to explore a Goffman-style performance staging of *presence techniques,* which underlie motivations to act, and all social encounters. An emphasis is placed on the awareness of the appropriateness of new actions, and how these relate back to established systems of social behaviour. Here the role of agency as part of presence techniques is seen to be actively put in place by the individual and organised by a continual reflexive awareness of the profile presence. I go on to suggest that where the vision of contemporary society was derived from a process of self-alienation and social fragmentation (cf. Giddens, 1991), there is instead an embracing of social reflexivity and celebration of participatory modes of social being in constant association with others. The approach is to follow the dynamic of how presence techniques represent *everyday* encounters. I share with those in the study a significant shift in the use of social media resources, which act as a complement to the already established patterns of Facebook use. I go on to suggest how the presence techniques are representative of a new culture, which is facilitated by the *everyday* experiences of *'doing'* and *'being'* across social media.

- Chapter Seven -
Presence Techniques

'Let your performance do the thinking[65]*'*

(H. Jackson Brown Jr., American best selling writer)

Introduction

This chapter frames the encounters of the research participants as 'presence techniques'. I suggest that such techniques are not tied to just Facebook, but have been carried across a range of other social media resources, which include Twitter, Flickr, YouTube etc. A new element to the interactions and profile presence already explored here is how social media have infiltrated into the lives of other friends and family that were initially outside the university Facebook network. Here I continue my critique of the 'contemporary', multifarious versions of the self and social identity that have been determined by a transformative conception of social processes. Rather than a social autonomy based on individualisation, I propose that presence techniques are essential in their association with others as a necessary and expected part of sociability. This is less about a controlled or narcissistic model of social interaction, throughout the organisation of social encounters that are given meaning precisely because they are carried out with known others. In keeping with the structure of the previous chapters, I identify three main dimensions of the presence techniques. These are directed by the, *natural extension of everyday relations, social vigilance* of the user and a, *compulsive obligation* to participate with others across social media. I explore each of these dimensions in turn and borrow from Goffman (1963) ideas about performance, and the social situation of the self. This provides the framework for the perceived 'boundaries' of interactions, where I suggest

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[65] *Quote from, http://quotationsbook.com/quote/457/*

there is an emerging orderliness in the 'normalisation' of social media use in the everyday.

7.1 First dimension: the natural extension of everyday relations

This first dimension resonates with the element of profile presence that I outlined in Chapter Six as being, 'anchored in the real'. As I explained in Chapter Five, the shape of Facebook networks was led initially by the personalisation and display of connections to known university friends. The initial *encouragement* to join Facebook and *collaboration* with others that contributed to profile presence, highlight how these social networks reflect already existing relations and prevailing social norms. Thus, the putting in place of networks as described in Chapter Five, constitutes an expressive social act in itself. This means that the way the individual chooses to display their relationships is crucial to subsequent social encounters. To put this in simple terms, the arrangement of personal connections reflects key aspects of friendships' which I suggest are tied to presence techniques. For example, Lindsey, explained how she,

> 'only accepts Friend Requests from my friends, who are more than just acquaintances. On Facebook that just goes without saying, and friends are already friends (...) I always think to myself, why are you Friend Requesting me? What's the motivation there? Besides I don't want Wall posts and messages from someone I don't know, or don't care about (...) your friends are a good measure of who you are. My brothers just got all his crappy college mates on his Profile. Because I value my friends, I accept only those who are closest to me. I already know who that is, and just take a gut feeling for the rest' (Y.6).

Lindsey's 'gut feeling' represents a persistent theme in the data, where rather than being 'lost' amongst a multitude of information flows, the 'natural impulse' is to 'always make sure you're a part of what's going on' (Y.6). The apparent attention to an increased 'dependence' on social media and the compulsion to be as another participant, Holly, described, 'always (...) a part of what's going on' (Y.Gp.6.vi). This suggests a convergence of social media

encounters that provide new conveniences for social contact, and hold new anxieties about appropriate behaviour. For Holly, Like Lindsey, this was ordered by a reliance on her 'gut instinct' (Y.Gp.6.vi). As she pointed out during my final focus group at the University of York,

'it's about gut instinct. I let my gut lead when I'm doing stuff on Facebook, cos you're doing it all the time you don't stop and think about it do you? Maybe I should stop and think a bit more!' (Y.Gp.6.vi).

Thus, the visibility of the profile presence as an overt connection to friends within a given network is seen to fulfil certain social demands. Holly does not need to 'stop and think', where 'gut instinct' allows her to manage and guide her connections (Y.Gp.6.vi). In this context I propose a remodelling of the 'virtual' space and potentiality of the web-related associations that have been characterised by ambiguity and fluidity (cf. Turkle, 1995). Indeed, for both Lindsey and Holly, value is placed on those connections that were already active and in place, *before* they were transferred onto Facebook. What is represented is the specific characteristic of relationships and friendships as they already exist between individuals. Consequently, the social relations are implicitly related to known social processes and established identifiers that bring about a *stabilising* of social attributes and associations. For example, Holly described to the group how, 'all the friends I had before are also now on Facebook' (Y.Gp.6.vi). Lindsey does not feel she has to explain or justify the 'initiation' of her connections on Facebook, as her 'friends are already friends' (Y.6), and therefore it is seen as inevitable by Lindsey that her friends will continue to carry the same connection onto Facebook. Part of Lindsey's technique is to '*only* accept Friend Requests from my friends' (Y.6), as her social networks are sorted by degrees of 'closeness' (Y.6). This has echoes of the *'Inherently Social'* element of profile presence, which combined with presence techniques, fixes the dialectics of relationship structures and social encounters. This is evident from the 'value' that Lindsey places on her associations with friends and is comparable to her assessment and subsequent judgement of her brother's technique, which is

184

to 'just' connect with his 'crappy college mates' (Y.6). Despite Lindsey's criticism of her brother, her brother's behaviour is also tied to pre-established orders of social association that existed previously to their replication on Facebook. It is through such actions that Lindsey and her brother actively seek to *reproduce* both the connection to the friend, and the context of the relationship, for example, as a 'close friend', or 'college friend' (Y.6). Thus, we can surmise that for the research participants, an important dimension to the relationships that they *actively* seek to put in place across social media, is that they reflect the ordinary and mundane realities of already shared associations. It is here that each individual shares the connection and the relationship is seen to carry significant social weight as part of a principled negotiation of social communication and interaction. Whilst Giddens (1992: 196) has referred to the 'problem' or an 'antagonism towards the other' in terms of the restructuring of relationships, presence techniques are formed as an extension of already closely connected and valued relations. Hence where the 'open-ended' nature of the 'global project of modernity' was worked for 'against a background of acknowledged risk', (Giddens, 1992: 196) presence techniques are secured by the certainty of social outcomes, which are already established in the everyday. Therefore, what prevails are the well-known connections with others across social media, as these are viewed as already recognised social encounters.

The implicit involvement of friends, and connection to *real* friends, is an important element of the research participants' relationships. These mirrored the taken-for-granted connections that they had already in place and were tied to pre-established *social scripts*. For Lindsey such social scripts involve the recognition of standardised and well-practiced, or pre-rehearsed, social markers. For example, as demonstrated by the above quote, one set of scripts is a shared understanding about what constitutes 'a friend' (Y.6). Lindsey goes on to describe her use of the popular Facebook

'Top Friends Application⁶⁶', which allows users to nominate individual friends who are displayed as a 'TopFriend' on a Profile Page. By drawing on other social media resources, such as TopFriend's, Lindsey can be seen to ground her connections as part of 'contextual cues', which are then used implicitly to direct her social encounters (cf. Goffman, 1963). Drawing from Goffman's (1963) dramaturgy metaphor, writing about 'science technology' Berg (2008: 65) has also referred to the notion of social scripts. In this context, he argues that such scripts are used to describe the, 'range of appropriate behaviours that apply in the situation. They allow us to quickly distil 'what is going on' and what roles we may choose from'. Hence, part of the function of the application TopFriends is that this allows Lindsey to indicate her own role (as a self-nominated Top Friend), and her connection to self-selected others. Defined in this way, Lindsey sets herself up as a connection who is intended to be more than 'just another link on Facebook. I use it to let my friends know that they are special to me' (Y.6). Thus in the context of Facebook this is a script that symbolises a specific relationship at a specific moment in time. For Lindsey and other users of such applications there is no guarantee that their action will be reciprocated. In addition, as Lindsey acknowledges, there is also the possibility that 'not all my friends use the same application' (Y.6), and hence such scripts can also be ignored. However, what this action represents is how the users of such technology rely on their sense of the range of appropriate behaviours for a given situation. From Lindsey's perspective it would inappropriate for her friends to ignore her request, and to not enter into her signalled action. The signification of herself as a TopFriend, sets a precedence for how Lindsey expects other friends to act, how she sees herself, and how others should interpret their own role within her network. Indeed, Lindsey herself recognised that there may be a, 'fall-out when friends are not included' (Y.6). In this context, TopFriends represents one technique that is intended to

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⁶⁶ http://www.facebook.com/applications/Top_Friends/2425101550

186

provide a consistent and stable model for encounters. As Lindsey explains, her request is scripted so that it can be either 'accepted' or 'rejected' (Y.6).

Other writers have suggested a model for social embeddedness that must be 'actively organised' by the individual and situated by the 'primary identity' of the self (Castells, 1997). Typically this perspective has emerged out of the 'uncertainty' of social reality (e.g. Beck-Gernsheim and Beck, 1995; Giddens, 1991). This radicalised individualisation of the self misses the subtleties of the reproduction of *known* relations, as they have been allowed to occur across Facebook. For example, Lindsey states that her nomination of TopFriends is 'deliberate (...) not random, only for my friends I'm closest to already' (Y.6). Thus, for Lindsey and others they can be seen to side step what have been viewed as 'uncertain' and 'indeterminate' social elements (Giddens, 1991). Instead, for these particular young people, there is a reliance on the social embeddedness of their *known* relationships and already forged scripts. Founded on *genuine* ties to others, the networks that emerged were founded on the equivalent social structure, which held the same relations both up close and at a distance from Facebook. I use the metaphor of distance to highlight how the previous duality of online and offline, virtual and real, are redundant in this context. Instead, relationships bridge such gaps and reveal, as in Lindsey's case for her TopFriends on Facebook, how such associations reflect those, 'friends I'm closest to already' (Y.6) as a united set of social relations. Pahl and Spencer (2004) highlight the role of the individual as the determining influence in shaping social obligation. Whilst the research participants seek to 'find' friendships on Facebook, these replicate those 'friends I'm closest to already' (Y.6), rather than being replaced by the 'neurotic demands' or 'unrealisable goals' of a relationship distanced from traditional social values (Pahl and Spencer, 2004: 199). My argument is that, in effect, social scripts have come full circle. From out of the supposed fractured or ruptured identity favoured by the postmodern commentators, to a social identity and accompanying

techniques that are founded upon dominant cultural symbols and pre-scripted systems of knowledge. In this way presence techniques encompass both up close and at a distance associations as they move in and out of focus across social media. For example a prioritisation for Lindsey and other participants was that the friendships displayed on Facebook share a close symmetry with their relations they were already familiar in other contexts. As a result such connections are rarely contested on Facebook where they are transferred across as a part of known associations. Indeed, as Bidart and Degenne (2005: 3) suggest 'Each friendship network is the result of a process of construction and re-composition'. For the research participants the 'friendship agenda' is fixed, or maintained, by the re-forming of such ties across social media and seen as part of the natural dynamic of friendship ties. As Bryony revealed,

> *'remember when you first had a mobile, and there would be those friends whose numbers you had, and those that you chose not to bother with? It's the same with Facebook (...) When I first joined I remember how I wanted to connect to just my closest friends'* (Y.27).

Here the patterning of friendship ties brings together the known ties that Bryony already has. Her method of defining her networks by the evaluation of closeness is similar to Lindsey's where they share an extension of everyday norms and values. Hence personal networks emerge as the association and evaluation of known relations that are sought by the expected affirmative reciprocation of ties. For David such integration was an integral part of his utilisation of Facebook and other social media. He pointed out how,

> *'It's not all about my friends just on Facebook. Using technology is more about how I can connect with any of my friends whenever I like the same way I would if I weren't using Facebook (...) I'm Facebooking the majority of the time, but this doesn't mean that I'm only tied to my computer or I don't see my real friends (...) I've now got a new phone, hello! and use the wireless on my mobile to Twitter (...) what I like about Facebook is how even if I'm Tweating or*

updating Plaxo they all link back to each other (...) If I set my status on one my
friends can all read the same thing' (Y.36).

The social circumstance of the individual is key to Goffman's (1963) analysis of interaction, where both the 'social situation' and 'social occasion' provide a context for the intended contact. In the above extract, David refers to the action of 'Facebooking' (Y.36), which replicates both the situation, and the occasion for the social interaction. To follow Goffman (1963), Facebook and other social media can be used to refer to the spatial environment where there is a, 'monitoring of possibilities' of interaction, as well as the wider social context for *when* the encounter is taking place (Smith, 2006: 36). I refer to 'when', rather than 'where' as such encounters transcend, or rather overcome the restrictive dimensions of a physical or material 'reality'. This is not to suggest that interactions are without a 'stable core', but to emphasise how such actions are gradual *and* cumulative. Here the pre-embeddedness of friendship ties already in place reveals the set of paralleled associations as they emerge on Facebook. Hence friendship relations are stratified by the constituents of what Pahl and Spencer (2004) have referred to as the 'personal community' that was in place before the same relations were transferred across other social media. For David, and other high users of social media, the opportunities to extend further social relations are reinforced by the use of numerous social media resources. In the above extract David mentions multiple social media including, Facebook, Twitter and Plaxo, which have become commonplace and everyday resources as modes of contact to his friends. It is here that David's emphasis on how such technology, 'all link back to each other' and his presumption, 'if I set my status on one my friends can all read the same thing' (Y.36) show a heightened awareness of his moment of use, *and* expectation for the way he envisages his friends to be responsive to his updates. To return to my description of social scripts, David is, in essence, securing his actions within pre-scripted codes of behaviour that apply to how he uses social media. For example he *expects* his friends to 'all read the same thing' (Y.36), where it is

his expectation that those in his network will (want to) know 'what is going on' (Y.36) and even the role that David is drawing upon. To make this point stronger, I asked David to give an example of one of his updates, he described, 'mostly it tends to be day-to-day stuff. You know like what you're doing, who you're with. Like now I'm being interviewed by you, so my status is 'being interviewed by Maz', or like last night I updated it to going on out with Karen (hot date)' (Y.36). After our interview David shared the following update,

Figure 7.i Image from 'David's' Status Update

is happy : it's sunny, it's relaxed... it's a typical SoCal Friday :-).

In terms of social scripts, Status Updates are harder to define as there are numerous intended recipients who may be reading the same 'plot' at different times and, as in David's case, across different resources. However, whilst the context of the update can shift, the content (and scripting) of the message is consistent whether on Twitter, Facebook or other social media. Thus Status Updates, represent an assemblage of social meaning that is relevant to the named individual, and has intended significance for friends. Broadcast to others, Status Updates can therefore be seen as social scripts as they are examples of the intention to show both the, *what* is going on and with *whom* (cf. Goffman, 1963). Here the observed relationship between action and individual is derived from the social situating of the connection between one person and another. My argument here is that the association with another, foregrounded as a part of social networks, must be understand as stratified by the identification of interpersonal affinities, which are implicit within the model of presence techniques. In this way, presence techniques are revealed to be guided by a social display of profile presence that is an expression of the personal relations of the individual and dependent upon scripted social processes.

The affordances offered by Facebook have developed during the course of the study (see Chapter Three). As the research participants shared a presence across Facebook, those like David also started to use an array of other resources to update information about themselves (e.g. Twitter, Plaxo, Flickr). Here the emphasis is to 'connect with any of my friends whenever I like' (Y.36). David is not unique in this sense, and whilst his range of social media is at a higher level, his use of the technology which feeds back into itself, to remain constantly connected to friends, and to update numerous sites at the same time, are patterns that are reproduced throughout the data. David's dedication to his range of social media is seen as part of the, 'inevitable'; 'ordinary'; 'expected', (Y.36) consequences of being a participant within digital social networks. It is noticeable how David in his discussion changed the noun 'Facebook', into a verb, 'I'm Facebooking the majority of the time' (Y.36). A similar relation has emerged with Google, where usage of the site's name has become a common verb to describe the searching and retrieving of information on the web[67]. For those like David, Facebook is viewed as a 'natural' way to manage social connections, and is indicative of, 'the way things are', where he surmises how, 'it was always going to happen' (Y.36). Bryony takes a similar outlook, and describes how,

> *'it's natural to me to have a Facebook account and for this to link to everything else that I use (...) I wouldn't count myself as a 'geek' because of everything that I use, it naturally happened. So I already had a Flickr and LastFM[68] accounts, and now that you can add these onto your Profile it's easy for me to see everything there. My friends get to see added stuff too (...) When I'm playing a song on LastFM, everyone on Facebook knows what I am listening to'* (Y.27).

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[67] *A similar discussion has been posted on the official Google blog, entitled, 'Do you 'Google?''* (*September, 2006*), http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2006/10/do-you-google.html
[68] *Last.fm is a UNITED KINGDOM-based internet radio and 'music community' website. The site was founded in 2002.*

From Bryony's description we have a sense of her attentiveness to social media, which represents an ordinary set of social actions, 'I wouldn't count myself as a 'geek'' (Y.27). Bryony's level of involvement, reflects a classic distinction between, what in another public context Goffman (1963) has distinguished as, two distinct types of interaction. The first, 'unfocused interaction', refers to 'the kind of communication that occurs when one gleans information about another person by glancing at him'. The second is 'focused interaction' that 'occurs when persons gather together and openly cooperate to sustain a single focus of attention' (Goffman, 1963: 24). Where Goffman (1963) was writing about face-to-face situations, his characterisation of these types of encounters shares a resonance with the ways the research participants sought to collaborate with others, and used this as an evaluation of each other's social behaviour. To put this into context, I use this construct to refer to an individual's perception of the intention of their action and attention concerning the encounter. For example, Bryony describes how when she listens to a song on LastFM, she expects that 'everyone on Facebook knows what I am listening to' (Y.27). This correlates with Goffman's notion of unfocused interaction, where Bryony's awareness of her friends, and expected peripheral monitoring of her own action contains social meaning. An example of focused interaction would be the instance of writing and sending a message, where a named recipient is intended as the focus of the action. As David described earlier actions such as Status Updates can occur almost 'unconsciously' (Y.36), on an automatic level and hold implicit social meaning. This notion is also reinforced by Sam's observations. In a discussion about Facebook Status Updates, he upheld how,

'it's like an unconscious reflex. Well that's how it started with my Status Updates. First of all it was just another fun aspect to Facebook. Then I started to use Twitter, and now I'm addicted to both (...) so I've got it so my Twitter updates Facebook and vice-versa (...) you know that friends are reading them, well I read my friends' ones (...) so the most recent thing, is now I update via my mobile. So I text Twitter and you know the rest' (Y.52).

Sam's range of social techniques, from awareness of his Status Updates on Facebook and Twitter, to navigation of social media via his mobile phone, represents his *ongoing* adjustment to the cumulative effects of both his, and other's actions. Like David, Sam describes his engagement as 'unconscious' (Y.52) yet, at the same time, there is also conscious engagement to an ongoing self-monitoring as in the 'I' he refers to who 'started to use Twitter', as well as his attention to friends' actions, 'you know that friends are reading them, well I read my friends' ones' (Y.52).

In a later discussion with Sam (which took place, first in-person, and then with numerous messages and updates across Facebook and Twitter) I asked whether he had a conscious awareness of the effect of his status updates. Sam replied (very appropriately) via Twitter, '@mazphd its about you and your friend being in the moment' (Y.52)[69]. We begin to see here the emergence of a participatory culture, led by customary social practices and rituals, which provide a degree of context for successive interactions. To be, 'in the moment' (Y.52), for Sam, reflects both his management of information and style of interaction. To take another perspective, I asked Sam what it meant if he were not 'in the moment', he replied via Facebook,

> *'for one, I'd miss answering your questions! LOL! Seriously though, it would be like not getting a text when everyone else is going out, so you wouldn't know where to go, or who was going (...) you'd be left out'* (Y.52).

The risk of not being, 'in the moment' (Y.52), is that Sam is set apart, or will miss out completely from encounters. An important aspect for Sam is the attention he gives to friends as a part of already embedded values and norms, which facilitate interaction. For example, Sam admitted that he,

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[69] *One of the features on Twitter means that users can send direct 'tweats' to a specified user. The use of the '@' symbol together with the username indicates this intention. In this case, '@mazphd indicates a message intended for mazphd (me). Other Twitter users can also read the updates, as they are displayed in user's feeds and published on the Public Timeline. The Public Timeline is the public aggregation of all Twitter feeds from all users on the site.*

'wouldn't be as hooked, if friends weren't also updating Facebook and using Twitter all the time (...) you do it for your friends, like when your friends all took up football you did too' (Y.52).

By emphasising the focus on friends, the participatory aspects of social media represent a natural extension of everyday interactions. Thus inclined, the emerging pattern by these young people is for a devoted attention to friend's daily actions and demands, as they take place across Facebook, *and* how these have been shared across other forms of social media.

Part of my research story has been about how social interactions and practices have extended, and at the same time converged, across multiple social media resources. In August 2007, I speculated about how such *mobile* social practices represented 'A new mobile way of life[70]' (mh) (see figure 7.ii, overleaf).

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[70] http://properfacebooketiquette.blogspot.com/2007/08/new-mobile-life.html

Figure 7.ii Extract from Facebook Etiquette blog, 'A new mobile way of life'

A new mobile way of life?

I have a new mobile phone in my life. Is it necessary for me to activate my Facebook account to stream to my new device?

In the world of social networking you are only as 'up-to-date' as your last meander into your digital world and network links. Moreover, social networking is about participation and as such a complex social 'monster'. Where once you were secure in your friendships maintained by a friendly wave, a 'hello', nod of the head or chat on the phone, now these informal gestures have become part and parcel of a milieu of pokes, wall posts, tags and 'grow a gift' applications.

A multitude of 'social moments' can easily run away from you if they are not maintained and crafted with a 'skill' that requires you to be here, there and everywhere all at once as you keep atop event invitations, posts, pokes and digital 'hello's'.

In the post I described interactions as, 'A multitude of 'social moments', which 'can easily run away from you if they are not maintained and crafted with 'skill''. Indeed, such moments, 'require you to be here, there and everywhere, all at once as you keep atop event invitations, posts, pokes and digital 'hello's'' (Wednesday, 27 August 2007).

Thus in contrast to assumptions about the 'chaos and collapse' of 'cyber-society' (Snyder et al, 2006: 1), those in this study make mention of a revised social *tone*. Such encounters favour seemingly spontaneous interaction, which take place as and when, in the flow of the moment. Interactions can appear spontaneous and without a specific purpose (e.g. an update on Twitter, or Facebook Status). However, another viewpoint is to question the spontaneity of such encounters, when these form an integral part of the

software code of the technology. For example, if we take David, Sam and Bryony's dedication to their connections as an example of the same awareness, social interactions become less 'spontaneous' where they are reinforced by the very mechanisms used to generate the social content. To emphasise this point further, both David and Lindsey describe how they feel 'addicted' (Y.6; Y.36) to updating and using Facebook and Twitter. At the same time, the same social media are viewed as a 'natural' part of daily routines and social interaction. Sam went on to describe how he has experienced instances when he *'had to'*, 'tear myself away' from being attentive to social media during 'inappropriate times (...) usually when I'm visiting my parents' (Y.52). The same themes were recurrent in the seven blog comments, which I received about the above post,

> *'George said...*
>
> *So connected so good but is this not more pressure to keep SNS addiction up. What about a new NoSpace service?'* (7:51 AM, 24 August 2007).

Followed by Gerald's observation,

> *'gerald said...*
>
> *im thinking i should cancel my hol so i dont have to have the trauma of being out of touch! Or maybe i should just buy a new phone to download all my updates!'* (5:57 PM, 27 August 2007).

And a question from Anonymous,

> *'Anonymous said...*
>
> *Do you have any thoughts on this - seems a new form of addiction? (...) woke up one morning with fear in my bones, because the first thing I wanted to do wasn't to have a cup of tea – but check my Facebook'* (8:50 PM, 26 August 2007).

As we enter into a new cultural framing of social media, there arise social anxieties about the possibilities and/or risks about not only how to stay connected, but how to disconnect. Anxieties were also about how to safeguard an everyday presence that was felt to be under scrutiny from others across social media. For example, in discussion with Robert, he described one of the most 'seductive' qualities of Facebook was that it

allowed him to be 'always on and always ready to go, go, go! I'm never missing out, as like you Maz, I'm always there' (Y.53). Others showed a similar enthusiasm, where social media were seen to allow for an 'always on' (M.16) presence, which was seen as a 'great' (Y.53) and 'fun' (M.16) aspect of the technology. Indeed, such presence was meaningful and 'enriching' because it was 'used everyday' (M.16). Samantha mentioned,

> 'Facebook is like the sea. It's constantly there, and every now and then I just want to dip my toe into it. Other times I'll go for a swim and get caught up in the tides' (Y.17).

Overall, in terms of the addictive qualities of Facebook, this was seen in a positive light, and as more evidence of the ordinariness of social network links. Stephanie, asked me during her interview 'So it's ok that I'm never off Facebook. I'm normal right?' (Y.18). In another interview Benjamin observed,

> 'it's very seductive, all of this (social media), it's like you're part of a club (...) membership only you and your friends (...) better than that you're the main club member, everything is about you' (Y.2).

Similarly Oliver was taken by the seductiveness of Facebook, describing it as 'slick', 'smooth' and how, 'I really feel the allure of the site!' (Y.15). The constant presence of friends, and sense of their own profile presence, together with the resources of the technology, which were seen to have 'so subtly' infiltrated 'every part of my life' (Y.9), meant that part of the seduction was the normalisation of this kind of social interaction, as this became routine in everyday life.

An important theme in this study is the way that the dualities established in research about the first phase of the web (e.g. Rheingold, 1993; Turkle, 1995), and in particular the distinctions between 'online' and 'offline' are not appropriate to the experiences described by the research. Here there is a movement away from dualities and a re-focus on the 'ordinary', more 'mundane' and *expected* uses of social media in daily life. Thus, dualities lose significance, neither distinguished as 'virtual' or 'real', instead social media

197

are representative of expected modes of 'doing' and 'being' social, which are seen to arise *naturally*. In the next section I explore what I frame as 'social vigilance', which refers to participants' continual attentiveness and 'watchfulness' of encounters as these occur, and are situated by being constantly *in-the-moment*. I lead into this discussion with a description of the foregrounding of others' use of Facebook, before expanding on the everyday processes that accompany the research participants' social vigilance.

7.2 Second dimension: social vigilance

In Chapter Six I established how the perception and influence of friends was paramount to the creation of profile presence. As part of presence techniques, this reflects an increasing awareness of the activities and connectedness to friends in personal networks. Participants were attuned to their friends' use of Facebook even before they had fully developed their own profile presence, Nicholas's stance is typical in this regard,

> *'I was so enticed onto Facebook, all my friends are there, I was constantlyhearing about what they were doing, and having to deal with explaining why I wasn't using it too'* (M.7).

Having joined Facebook, and with his profile presence in place, Nicholas' connectedness was seen as complementary to his friends daily use of the site, 'they were already there, so it was just easy for me to fall into line with what they were doing, I sound like a bit of a sheep don't I?!' (M.7). In a follow up Facebook message exchange in 2008, I asked Nicholas if he still, 'felt like a sheep' (mh) he replied,

> *'LOL[71]! So you remember that! No I'm less a sheep now and more the leader of the pack! I've become a wolf! ☺ (...) my Facebook use has got out of hand – well that's what my mum says, but she doesn't understand it. My older brother's on Facebook now, and is the sheep that I used to be (...) he's as addicted as I am'* (M.7).

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[71] *LOL abbreviation: Laugh Out Loud.*

Where social media was felt to be a natural extension of connections already established with friends, negative judgements from other friends and/or family members, who were non-users, were framed by a 'lack of understanding about how things are happening today' (M.7). Clara described how,

> 'since my mum's signed up to Facebook there's no stopping her! Before she was all 'get off that computer!' Now she's on there more than I am! Between her and her friends they're having a great time catching up (...) (laughing) she's in danger of having more friends than me' (Y.42).

Like Clara before her, Clara's mother, Nina, was encouraged onto Facebook because her daughter and friends were already using the site. After talking with Clara, I took the opportunity to discuss the details of how and why Nina started to use Facebook. This was via a short interview and follow-up Facebook message exchange in January 2008. Nina set out how,

> 'Clara was a horror, always on Facebook. To get her off the thing I thought the best thing I could do was be the classic mum and invade her space, so I signed up. After I signed up, I had found that I had loads of friends already on the site. People I hadn't heard from in years. We got to messaging pretty regular, before I knew it I had more friends than Clara. Did she mention that to you? She doesn't like to admit it! (...) so my friends and I write and we catch up. I don't use it (Facebook) as much as Clara. Personally I still prefer the phone, and I have no idea what the Poke is for. Something rude?' (Y.42i).

Like her daughter, and as others have mentioned, Nina, follows the same four-stage trajectory that I set out in Chapter Five of, encouragement, collaboration, reciprocation and reinforcement. However, the difference lies in the emphasis on the attention that Nina pays to her network compared to Clara, 'I don't use it as much as Clara' (Y.42i), she admits. For Clara and the others, such connections are 'inevitable' and viewed as a natural extension of their social lives. By contrast, Nina's preferred social technique remains tied to voice calls over the landline telephone or mobile. However, talking with both mother and daughter together, there were already hints at the repetition of the ways in which Nina's level of participation, mirrored Clara's,

'mum I've so been there! You wait, give it six months and you'll never be off

Facebook. You already sent me that update via your mobile' (Y.42).

Together, Clara's, Nina's and Nicholas's experiences, show a lag in the take up of Facebook and other social media by different social groups. This leaves space for a potential lack of understanding about the purpose of the technology, and related presence techniques. For example at the end of the interview, Nina admits that she had, 'no idea what the Poke is for. Something rude?' (Y.42i). Hence for users who are not as familiar with social media, such participation can be easily viewed as 'unnecessary', 'invasive', 'intrusive' and even 'over hyped' (e.g. Livingstone, 2008b; Snyder et al, 2006). Or, as in Nina's case, social media and related actions simply become confusing.

When first becoming a user of Facebook, as I explained in Chapter Five, clear patterns of use emerge. For these particular young people, these take the individual from casual user, to being more proficient, and finally at a fully *involved* level of everyday social orientation. As the experiences detailed in the research suggest, this process is more likely to be realised through the perceptual relevance of friend's actions. Unlike her daughter, Nina is less inclined toward Facebook as her friends prefer to engage using other social media. If, as I suggest, we conceive of Facebook as cumulative encounters and forms of 'organised' social gatherings, we can share with Goffman (1963) his construct of a 'we-rationale'. Here the individual has a 'heightened sense of moral responsibility for one's act' (Goffman, 1963: 89). Goffman's (1963) focus is on the 'minor ceremonies' and 'social control' during encounters, which as he observes keeps individuals 'in line' during interaction. The awareness of others' perception of behaviour, which fluctuate between, 'seeing what my friends are up to' and, 'I *have to* explain to my parents what Facebook is about' (M.7), are underlined by shared rituals and mutual activities. From this standpoint, an individual will either be concerned to fully enter into and be a part of social media encounters, or will act to distance themselves until others, who are seen to share the same degree of connectedness and use, become more involved. In effect, once 'set up' on

Facebook, it was expected that participants had opened themselves up to one another and this created opportunity for other encounters. Framed as 'social vigilance' the connectedness is at a level of involvement where, to return to Nicholas's observations, it was 'easy (...) to forget that you're there' (M.7).

To live out and experience modes of interaction, where you can 'forget you're there' (M.7), have shaped not only the structure of the data, but also influenced my own profile presence and presence techniques. The manner in which I have taken the reader through the social dimensions of research participants, suggests there to be a constant vigilance of habits, customs and the social behaviour of friends, as well as the functionality of social media. As Natalie points out, 'you've got to keep up with what's going on (...) I was the first of my friends to use Scrabulous[72]' (Y.11). The mutual connectedness and sharing of social content has contributed to what can be viewed as a cultural ethos, which persists at the level of sociability amongst groups of friends in the judgement of their actions. Far from being a passive actor 'sat' behind what Turkle (1995) referred to as 'the screen', individuals actively engage with one another through a range of participatory-led social activities, and typically take part in more than one set of encounters at the same time. For example to return to Sam, Bryony, David and Lindsey at the beginning of this chapter, they explained how they used a multitude of social media, such as Twitter, LastFM and Flickr to be a continuous part of the action. In March 2008, on a train from York to London, I was struck by the observable uses of social media. Nearly everyone had a mobile phone out on the table in front of them, and over half the carriage (like myself) was using laptops to access the free wifi network on the train. For critics of the first version of the web, seen as a cyberspace, individuals were accused of 'living at a distance', and viewed as 'disconnected' from one another (Virilio, 2000).

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[72] *At the time, Scrabulous was a third party application on Facebook. In August 2008 the application was banned on the United Kingdom version of the site, which was later extended worldwide as Mattel the company which owns the rights to the Scrabble board game did not authorise the license of Scrabble on Facebook.*

For the participants in this study, and increasingly other users who are friends and family of the main users, individuals treat such encounters and interactions as 'live', and where they choose to live 'up-close-and-personal' (Hardey, 2007). Indeed, as I explained in the previous section, such social situations represent an expected assemblage of daily social encounters, where there is constant vigilance about what is going on, who is taking action and in what way(s).

The social vigilance of others is a reflection of the critical moment when Facebook tipped from being seen as something 'novel', that 'just friends were using' (Y.42), to a part of well-established and expected daily routines across a range of networks. To refer back to the linear sequence in Chapter Five, this was most acutely tied to the sense of reciprocated links, and the reinforcement of mutual social action. Alexander offered this perspective,

> 'Talking with you about all this, I feel excited and empowered to be a part of such networks. Outside of my friends, there are worries about a loss of control, or addiction to Facebook and Twitter and so on. But we're coping fine aren't we? If anything I love how much I can see of what my friends are up to (...) that's the biggest change for people to get used to' (Y.40).

My discussion with Alexander, which centred on the manner in which he conceptualised his own use of social media, and the influence amongst his friends, shared much with the general sense of orientation and connection that had been voiced by the others in the research. Alexander spells out the 'biggest change' as the way in which 'friends can see what you're up to', where the observation and vigilance of social networks is a social 'given' (Y.40). I want to spend some time focusing on this perception of being able to *see* what friends are up to, and how those in the study attach a special significance to this state. To return to Goffman (1963: 88), an 'encounter is initiated by someone making an opening move, typically by means of a special expression of the *eyes'*. The display of images, and even video content on social media allows for attention to be paid to the appearance and even the eyes of the intended recipient of communication. However, it is rare that

this occurs during synchronous action, such as with a web cam. One could ask the question, whether the research participants' interactions are 'proper' encounters, or can only ever be 'poorer' imitations compared with the focussed interaction of *face-to-face engagement* (cf. Goffman 1963). Implicit within any social media action is the presence of at least two participants, whether as a sender and receiver of messages, contributor to Wall posts etc., or as an observer of friends' encounters. For Goffman (1963: 88) a mutual understanding of the social situation is directed even when, 'no word of direction or sociability may be spoken'. In this instance visual cues indicate social meaning and sustain cognitive attention. Thus, nonverbal actions of equal importance, as Duncan suggests from his experience,

> *'a couple of nights ago I tried to message my ex. I went to 'compose message' on Facebook, and her name didn't come up in my friends list. I'll admit that was a bit of a shock. I thought that maybe she had just put on a limited profile, so she wasn't showing up in my friend list (...) I used my friend's Facebook account to check that she was still on there, as if she's blocked me I wouldn't be able to tell, and he was able to still message her. I felt really hurt that she felt she had to not only block me, but totally hide her profile from me too. That hurt'* (Y.39).

I asked Duncan what he felt could be an explanation for his ex-girlfriend's 'disappearance'. He explained,

> *'it wasn't like we fell out or anything, we just drifted apart. I just assumed that we would always stay in touch, even if it was just over Facebook. I guess I was neglectful of her, and she had a friend cull that included me. Now I can't even see her (on Facebook)'* (Y.39).

From the above, Duncan's final reflection is telling 'Now I can't even *see* her' (Y.39). Thus, it is the responsibility of the individual to be seen, and to be attentive to friends. The moment when the reciprocation of the connection is broken, e.g. a social prompt is ignored or a friend goes 'off script', the interaction usually comes to an end. The consequence for the relationship, to use Duncan's words, is that this is inevitably broken and 'drifts apart' (Y.39), or in the most extreme circumstances, comes to an end. For Goffman (1963)

when two persons are mutually present they are mutually attentive. The profile presence and strategic use of presence techniques means the participants are by some degree constantly mutually present, and therefore required acknowledgement of their interaction. The focus on sight and heightened awareness to be able to 'see' one another represents the main manner through which social attention is initiated and sustained. Duncan's intended communication is broken because he 'can't even see her' (Y.39), and prevents Duncan as the initiator from being able to interact, or to retrace his relationship.

Here the attitude is that such connections circulate freely and increase the velocity of interactions. What is interesting is where the pace of exchange is heightened by attention to 'data flows' (cf. Lash, 2002), these are not viewed as an 'overload' or excess of interactant content. If anything there is a demand for *more* information, as well as concerns about misinformation. In a similar situation to Duncan, Hugo outlined,

> 'so trying to get back in touch with an ex, and I can't find her anywhere. She's not on Facebook, or MySpace, or Bebo, or anywhere else. I've Googled her and I can't find her. At first that was so frustrating, and now it's like a mystery. Where is she? Why isn't she anywhere? Has something happened to her? I'm sure her family would have mentioned something to me if it had. Even if she's emigrated to Australia she would be using Facebook or something like that. Don't you think it's weird I can't find her? (...) I can't find her anywhere' (Y.38).

From both Duncan and Hugo's perspective, to be 'findable' and visible across social media carries significant social weight. Hugo characterised this as, 'everyone knows who and where you are' (Y.38). To be hidden or absent from social media has with it an uncertainty, which for Hugo is manifest as a source of anxiety, speculation and concern. 'Don't you think it's weird I can't find her?' (Y.38) he asks. Thus, to follow the Lyon's (2005: 4) work on surveillance, at any given moment one could wonder, 'Who is watching? Why are they watching?', and 'What will they do?' However, 'surveillance' is not

the right description of the interplay that occurs between the social actors and possible social action I describe as presence techniques. More fitting is to view this dynamic as a social vigilance, where the individual is watchful and at the same time attentive to encounters afforded by social media. This becomes clearer when we take a closer look at some of the motives behind reasoning and judging behaviour. Sara explained how,

> 'when I fell out with one of my friends was when they posted a load of school days photos on Facebook and had tagged these without my permission. They weren't the most flattering, and school was such a hard time for me, that when the pictures just showed up for everyone to see one day it was quite a shock. I'm really careful about my image on Facebook (...) on my Flickr there's nothing that's unflattering (...) I guess I'm sensitive about what my friends see. It's not like being paranoid, just careful' (Y.41).

In his examination of social information, Goffman (1963) notes the importance of visibility, or as he frames, 'perceptibility' of the 'known-about-ness' of the individual. In the study, Goffman's (1963: 58) focus is on social stigma, where a coherent social picture of an individual can become 'contaminated', by what he explains as the consequent 'valuation of the individual'. Similarly we can view Sara's assessment or valuation of her self-image and accompanying profile presence as 'contaminated' by the inclusion of 'unflattering' photographs unexpectedly displayed by friends. From this perspective, the manner in which individuals were seen to manage their personal information is with a vigilance of friends' reactions and interpretation. I was motivated by such awareness, to ask Sara to explain what she had meant by 'being careful' (Y.41). She went on to describe,

> 'the way in which we're all so aware and watchful of each other. Not in a nasty way, but it's force of habit (...) The News Feed on Facebook shows everything, and you're quickly made to look a fool if you're not careful' (Y.41).

Whilst Sara's vigilance of her social media has a different motivation from Duncan's and Hugo's desire to re-connect with their ex-girlfriends, these scenarios incorporate similar emotionally led needs, for control and the management of information. The significance of such pronounced, and

outwardly individualistic behaviour, becomes clearer, when we consider vigilance as a socially led act. By this I mean the way vigilance incorporates itself within social expectations, and from this perspective represents an important dimension of presence technique. Despite the seemingly limitless possibilities, the act of vigilance offers only a limited range of social affordances, as social action and behaviour are in effect controlled by the parameters of the social media. For example, to return to Hugo, his not being able to locate and track down his ex-girlfriend has 'really hurt in a way' (Y.38), as he realises that he is tied to the limitation of the technology. Such efforts reflect how there is a corresponding change to how individuals intentionally seek out, are vigilant and monitor both their own and others' social actions. Katie noted how difficult it was being constantly aware and vigilant of her friends actions, 'knowing what everyone is up to, every second of the day is exhausting (...) you can only see and do so much at once' (Y.33).

To relate this back to the sense of profile presence in Chapter Six, the enactment of vigilance is manifest as part of the 'qualification' of the self, both in terms of presentation and the orientation of the encounter. Emergent from the data was how such observation and watchfulness had become routine within everyday, reflexive behaviour. As Michael questions, 'you find yourself just checking out friends, or are you really checking up?' (Y.30). In this instance there is mutual co-dependence on, to return to Lyon (2005), the 'Who', might be doing 'What' to whom. This involves individual attention to the collective *need* to coordinate encounters and the consolidation or reinforcement of the social action within this context. The end result is an amalgam of emotive and social meaning, as Amy revealed,

> 'sometimes I know that I'm doing it, you know watching what my friends are up to. So I'll read their Feeds, you know. Other times I'm not even aware that's what's happening (...) it could be that I've just connected to check messages, but then its tea time and I haven't even done that yet (...) I just do it' (Y.22).

To 'just do it' points toward a subconscious set of processes, and I am struck at this juncture, by the comparison with the Nike advertisement whose tag line 'Just Do It' captured the active moment of action. This distinction was not lost on Amy, who later reflected in the same interview, 'you just do it, but you're not aware that you are doing it, if that makes sense' (Y.22). In this context, what is important to recognise is that there is an *exaggeration* of social action. For the research participants', behaviour and activities are constantly noticed by others, and also include those instances when they are not consciously aware they are engaged in social action, e.g. reading friends' NewsFeeds and Status Updates.

Indeed, once forged, vigilance is 'hard to switch off' (Y.26), and is encompassed within the daily routines of social media connection and interaction. This is a good example of the way presence techniques feed into themselves. For example, by being attentive to friends Feeds, there is a corresponding awareness of the information broadcast through to your own Feeds. Annie offered this scenario,

> *'If it's a slow work day, well then I'll spend more time fiddling around on Facebook (...) once I updated my Profile picture, the same day, so did my boyfriend, and about five other friends. Coincidence? I think not. We're all watching each other after all!' (Y.24).*

By drawing on the act of changing her Profile picture, Annie reveals how the awareness of such action by her friends and boyfriend offer the possibility for shared experience, whether directly (e.g. comment on a Profile picture update), or indirectly (e.g. inspiration to also change a Profile picture). One key aspect of this trend is that encounters develop from the interconnectedness of the individual and their vigilance of networks. Thus, how individuals (re)adjust in response to a friend's performance, relates to the alignment of the self and at times more experimental modes of engagement across social media. Within this context, there is a constant evaluation of the expression and integrative acts of social behaviour in the

explication of social action and cultivation of presence. This is crucial because it highlights the alignment of self through the profile presence, alongside the development of emerging patterns of behaviour as presence techniques. Such techniques are maintained by the vigilance of others, and represent an act of processing social information and encounters as and when they occur. In the next section I explore how the mechanics of social media action constantly direct attention to through flows of information between the individual and friends.

7.3 Third dimension: compulsive obligation

In this section I draw out how the individuals in the study felt a compulsion to act, and to maintain an obligated awareness of others in their networks. This is summed up by a personal, 'compulsiveness to always use Facebook' (M.2), and to be 'always ready and ready for anything!' (Y.53), that was voiced by participants. It may be added that a failure to reciprocate, and reinforce social action, interrupts the anticipated feedback and recursive mechanics of the encounter.

Compulsive obligation emphasises some of the more contradictory elements of the use of social media. On the one side, the participants can be described as the most 'expert' of users. However at the same time, there was disclosure about insecurities of the appropriate manners, behaviour, routines and interactions. Such insecurities were more evident in the initial moments when the participants joined Facebook as described in Chapter Five. It is pertinent at this point to turn to the data collated during the latter part of the study, which was after the students had established a profile presence, and were able to reflect back on the pattern of their social media use. I initially met Carter during my stay at Melbourne University, after his involvement with the research in October 2006, Carter and myself were Facebook friends and have continued to stay in contact throughout the course of the research. In 2008, nearly three years after the initial interview, I encouraged Carter to

consider the ways in which his use of social media had changed, if at all. What follows are extracts from several SKYPE conversations, emails, Facebook messages and Tweats. I begin with an extract from a SKYPE conversation from June 2008,

> *'I guess you could say I live out a Facebook life huh (laughing). Well who doesn't these days?! Well look at us, we're still in touch after three years, you think that would have been as close if it weren't for something like Facebook? You already know how much I'm on Facebook, and now my new addiction is Twitter. Oh hey thanks for your tweat the other day, my sister loved that one! (…) So all this (social media) is the way we are and how we live our lives.*

> *(…) when we first met, I had only been on Facebook for about a month. Now I'm on Twitter, have Facebook on my iPhone, my sisters on Twitter, on Facebook, she follows me around (…) and I can be here there and everywhere, even in the UK talking with you! So I'm always here, and I know you're always there'* (M.2).

Carter's sense of living 'a Facebook life' (M.2) was a recurrent theme throughout the rest of the data, and has echoes of Daniel's earlier observation when he described himself as, 'Facebooking all the time' (M.2). With this in mind, Carter's throw-away comment, 'Well who doesn't these days?!' (M.2) appropriately sums up the pervasiveness of social media across multiple networks and amongst friends. It is worth noting that as the popularity of social media has increased and users like those included in this research, are encouraging family and other connections to join. For example, the acknowledgement of Carter's older sister on Facebook and Twitter is indicative of the next wave of users. As we saw with Clara's relationship with her mother Nina earlier, friends and family who share contact with already established users are also enticed to use social media.

Carter's consideration of the ways he utilises his social media, including Facebook and Twitter, and owns an iPhone are a sign of his compulsion to act, and commitment to his networks. Any failure to integrate the dynamics

of Carter's encounters was seen as potentially damaging to his sense of presence and would be perceived as a negative technique. Lee's (2006: 2) discussion about self-presentation in 'on-line' discussion groups holds similar overtones, where managing the wrong presence techniques, 'entail the fallout of sincerity and accountability'. To follow Goffman (1959), such actions indicate the 'impression management' of the self, where presence techniques represent an ever-present dynamic of everyday social media interaction processes. In this regard the individual is obliged, as Carter reminded me via Twitter, to be, 'Always on, always ready @mazphd' (M.2). This is almost a direct echo of Robert's earlier comment in this chapter where he described how he was, 'always on and always ready to go, go, go!' (Y.53). Carter later disclosed via a Facebook message, which I have included in full (see figure 7.iii), that,

Figure 7.iii Facebook message from 'Carter'

To:	Maz Hardey
Subject:	my life
Message:	Hi Maz! I'm not aware of how much I use Facebook - well not until you keep mentioning it to me of course! As I keep mentioning this is the way that things are. Now everyone's connected to everyone else and it's a beautiful thing. So it's about where you feel you belong and what you feel comfortable with doing . Even my mum feels comfortable on here. Personally, it's when people don't understand what Facebook is or why you would use something like Twitter, then there's problems. You asked whether I felt obliged to use Facebook (only with you - joking)! :D I don't feel obliged to use Facebook, but I do feel obligated to my friends. Like you send me a message, I'm going to get back to you. You know what I mean! but that was the case with texts, and now its the case for Facebook, and Twitter and whatevers round the corner. You'll be researching the next big thing soon enough, and asking yourself what the big deal about Facebook was. Catch you later

Attach: ⧉ Record Video ⧉ Share Link

(M.2)

From Carter's above message, his description of everyone, 'connected to everyone else and it's a beautiful thing' (M.2) had resonances with the connections I shared with my own friends and family. The inevitability of such status was emphasised when Carter disclosed in reference to Facebook that, 'Even my mum feels comfortable on here' (M.2). An important point about social information must be raised here, which is to do with the implied importance of friend connections, and what Goffman (1970: 60) frames as the 'informing character of the 'with' relationship in our society'. 'With' for Goffman (1970: 60) refers to the physical attendance of particular other(s), and he gives the following examples, 'To be 'with' someone is to arrive at a social occasion in his company, walk with him down a street, be a member of his party in a restaurant'. I mean 'with' in reference to how these young people felt they were *always* connected and attentive to actions *with* friends. Such technique dilemmas were most apparent when individuals described incidences dealing with previously 'lost', or 'old' friends. Lost contacts were typically re-established via a Friend Request, or message on Facebook. A friend of Carter's, Elise, shared with me that she was,

> 'connected to everyone that I know, and I mean EVERYONE. From school, from when I was at college, in my first year here (at Melbourne University), even friends of my parents from when I was really little and living in Hong Kong, everyone has Friend Requested me, and found me on Facebook' (M.3).

A theme noted by participants was the unintended consequences, and sense of obligation that individuals felt from such encounters. Elise's description of her Friend Request, represented a new opportunity to reconnect. At the same time the situation also held a new set of dilemmas, such as the unforeseen consequences of the action. This was assessed by the motivation and appropriateness of the Friend Request. In a discussion over SKYPE with Elise about her experience, she questioned,

> 'How do you deal with this? (...) I feel I can't say no. I mean no-one's going to Friend Request you who you hate, but I'm not sure I want everyone from school to know me now. That's a little weird. But then if you don't accept everyone and it gets back to other people then you're known as a 'bitch'. You have to

211

take charge. (...) There's one girl I didn't want to re-friend, but I already had on my Profile friends that we shared in common at school (...) so it would've been rude of me not to include her (...) I've set her to Limited Profile, just in case!' (M.3).

Elise felt a responsibility to 'take charge' and respond in kind to her Friend Requests. Underlying the encounter was a compulsion to reciprocate to the action, and to be seen to respond in the *right way*. My discussion with Elise, drew attention to the shared 'pause and reflect' process and calculation about 'how to deal with this?' (M.3), especially where the underlying concern was not to appear, in Elise's words, as 'a 'bitch" (M.3). This kind of self-reflection, ties to the status of Elise's profile presence, and her social actions as broadcast across social media. As Elise spelt out, 'I couldn't turn a Friend Request down (...) everyone else who'd been at college with that person would also know' (M.3). Elise's awareness of this is matched by her reflection upon her own actions, which are drawn together by her sense of compulsion and obligation to act. This same sense of obligation was one of the most popular topics on my blog, with a post entitled, 'Friended out the blue: a new obligation to act[73]' (see figure 7.iv, overleaf),

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[73] http://properfacebooketiquette.blogspot.com/2008/03/friended-out-blue-connecting-to-creep.html

Figure 7.iv Extract from Facebook Etiquette blog, 'Friended out the blue: a new obligation to act'

TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 2008

Friended out the blue: A new obligation to act

After falling out, my older sister and I are now not talking. She started seeing a new guy who has now *friend* requested me on Facebook; what's the best response?

Facebook makes connecting and staying in touch easy; both on the eye (users are unlikely to put up a bad profile picture) and in terms of time-saving. Collaboration and network shares aside, 'friending' can be an anxious experience. On the one hand it is You the 'friend' requestee who has put themselves out there to make a connection, especially precarious if the two parties have yet to establish a stable 'relationship' status. On the other had as a recipient of such a request, and again when the relationship status is hanging in the balance, you must respond appropriately should yourself appear rude, needy, or completely uninformed about how to negotiate a connected presence.

I received twelve comments to the posting all of whom shared with Elise her sense of responsibility to 'take charge' of their networks (AP Guy), and the observation by Anonymous who, 'craves connection but hates what it brings back and have sometimes manipulated things' (Anonymous). Here, the accumulation of the awareness of the potential outcomes of obligated associations, reflect the consequences of Carter's 'always on, always ready' (M.2) sensibility. Moments of 'absence', 'disconnection' or the act of ignoring a Friend Request, reveal how there is symbolic value in the actions that are produced and observed with others. Consequently there is also an equivalent meaning from those encounters that are 'left out' (M.2) or 'ignored' (Y.32) altogether. To highlight this model of behaviour, Jonathon mentioned,

213

'alright I confess, I am a Facebook addict! But so is everyone else! It really bugs me though when you know that someone has read your message, and aren't responding to you. Facebook tells you who's online' (Y.32).

For Jonathon meaning was not just a matter of the 'what' was exchanged directly from one person to another, but included attention to the details of friends' priorities and commitment to respond to him. One of the challenges was the possible friction when actions were left 'unanswered', which left room for interactional questions about 'what's going on' (Y.32). From Jonathon's perspective, the clear indication of when friends are 'logged in' to Facebook, suggests that such visibility has a significant role to play in the interpretation of presence techniques. For Sally she described how she,

'hate(s) the idea of leaving any message unanswered. It's part of being me now, I'm always the one my friends can rely upon to be there, ready (...) and respond there and then. If I don't I forget' (Y.14).

We can link Sally's sense of obligated responsibility to respond 'there and then' (Y.14), back to her sense of a persistent profile presence shared with friends that ensures she's 'always the one my friends can rely upon to be there, ready' (Y.14). Being constantly 'there, ready' (Y.14) holds a seemingly intractable problem for Sally. At one and the same time Sally is concerned about how she might be allowed to disconnect from her friends, and the ways in which she can justify to herself such an action. Sally distinguished how,

'there are times when it is a bit too much, and I want to let myself go and turn everything off. But then your phone goes and you forget about such moments. Also there are those times when you're sat at home just wanting and needing someone to get in touch and no-one does. Those times can make you feel really down, or maybe it's just sad to feel that way?' (Y.14).

The implied level of intimacy of interactions upholds the importance of presence techniques. Indeed, how individuals perceived one another, had been developed through the presence techniques they had chosen to enact, which were built on the encounters with others, and the perceived openness of sociability.

7.4 Conclusion

The use of social media as described in this chapter, creates new opportunities for social interaction, but also provides new obligations. The ability to be always 'in touch', or 'always on', is facilitated by the range of devices that are used to access social media resources. This ease of access shapes the expectations that friends will either always be available in-person, or through the monitoring of social software that reports encounters as and when they happen. One of the dilemmas for the research participants is the issue about how appropriate it is to disconnect, which must be explained as absences from the immediacy of social information. This is highlighted in the case of friends who seek to reinitiate connections with others or apparently disappear from social connections altogether. In this context, the participants were always aware, and are keen to follow, what I have contextualised as presence techniques. Such techniques provide social understanding and make possible communication across social media, in a way similar to the manners and etiquette that Goffman (1963) described in his work on everyday interaction. Thus, the three dimensions of presence techniques coalesce together to form what lies in the background of an individual's action across social media. The next chapter goes beyond the confines of the data as defined by purely university-based network connections. Here, I foreground myself as an active co-participant who shares a *seriously social* sensibility characterised by a constant engagement in, and awareness of social networks.

- Conclusion -

A seriously social sensibility

'Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility[74]'

Henry James (American expatriate writer 1843-1916)

'Sensibility cannot be acquired; people are born thus, or they have it not[75]'

Comtesse de Genlis, Stephanie-Felicite du Crest de Saint-Aubin

Introduction

A few months before the culmination of this study I was invited as a guest speaker to the June 2008 2gether08 Festival[76], sponsored by Channel 4 (see data collection timeline figure 4.i, page 123). The event's purpose was to 'explore how digital technologies can bring us major new social benefits'. Organised as an 'unconference'[77] this was facilitated as a participant-driven occasion for 'ideas and progress'. It was here that, when reflecting upon the meeting as an ethnographic experience some days later, I developed the notion of a seriously social sensibility. This was partly through the observation of the distinctive qualities of social media, by building on my engagement with the most innovative users, and also through a shared enthusiasm about the potential of such resources. At the event there was also the moment when I was identified as 'being seriously social' during a

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[74] *Quote taken from ThinkExist.com, http://thinkexist.com/quotes/with/keyword/sensibility/*

[75] *Quote taken from GIGA Quotes, http://www.giga-usa.com/quotes/topics/sensibility_t001.htm*

[76] *For more information refer to 2gether website retrieved from, http://2gether08.com/*

[77] *An unconference is typically with less structure than a traditional conference. Speakers contribute presentations as part of informal groups around a shared theme or topic. Harrison Owen (1997) discussed many of the techniques associated with the modern unconference in his book Open Space Technology. Such events can be managed using a number of different facilitation styles, some of the main ones include: BarCamp, BloggerCon, Birds of a Feather, Knowledge Café, FooCamp and Appreciative Inquiry. For more information see 'Unconference' entry on Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unconference*

series of exchanges with others who were in the audience during my presentation. Whilst speaking I was asked to introduce myself with emphasis on what I perceived as my particular 'speciality'. As my self-nominated area of expertise is defined by social media, this influenced me to identify 'my speciality' as,

> 'being social',
>
> 'oh so you mean you're seriously social', one member of the audience observed.

Thus, my premise for a set of social characteristics captured by the sense of being labelled as 'seriously social' was confirmed. What was significant about the event, and why it provides a pertinent way to introduce the concluding chapter to this study, was the emphasis on collective enterprise that was underlined by the principles I have already noted as 'presence techniques' in the lives of the students at the Universities of York and Melbourne. For example, there was a mutual emphasis on reciprocity and a compulsive obligation to contribute to social action as an indication that individuals were seen to be open and constantly available to others. As the leading and most engaged users of modern technology, the subjects of my study occupy a densely layered and complex social world – driven by the conditions of ubiquity, unbounded connectivity and the arrival of social information.

It was noticeable that, as the first to occupy SNSs and to utilise social media with enthusiasm, such users displayed similar patterns of interest, descriptions of social action and accompanying habits. One of the outcomes of this position is that it is possible to see how such engagement will infiltrate into other lives, and become formally consolidated by various institutions and sites of authority in the future. One consequence is that it is likely personal data will continue to evolve, partly as 'snapshot' information displayed on SNSs, as well as more in-depth and detailed data collected and maintained by official agencies. There will also be streams of unregulated

information, some certified by third parties and others maintained by the trusted guarantees of friends. Mitchell (2003: 198) foresaw a similar set of associations, where the 'data warehouse' of information marks the individual as

> 'an inhabitant of an electronically networked world, you not only have a verifiable name, you have extensive records of your background and past actions associated with that name'.

What Mitchell (2003) overlooks is how 'that name' is your own name where detailed digital records are tightly incorporated with already documented accounts to form a correlated data archive. In this context, reputation precedes the individual as we organise, retrieve and update information across a range of resources and how others will also be able to do the same for us. Hence, I anticipate a reconditioning of the social as serious where it also implies a constant vigilance of information, about others, and about ourselves, where ultimately we are responsible for our own privacy and data. Presently we carry multiple user names, passwords, PINs and digital identifiers to confirm our identity to others. It is easy to imagine that the next condition will be a convergence of all these identifiers, which will co-exist at the same time and be drawn upon in different settings and for different occasions. For example, a nick-name may serve as a header for a SNS, but a formal name such as shown on a birth -certificate will be retrievable and automatically traced to the same identity such as for the purchasing of goods or services, or the paying of tax. There are implications here for what has been described as the advancement of a surveillance society (Lyon, 1997; 2007). Currently there is the requirement to identify and to re-identify ourselves on SNSs and other web-based social media (e.g. as 'Maz Hardey on Facebook, 'Mariann Hardey' on LinkedIn or to carry out a formal transaction on Amazon) in the near future this will be automatically sorted for us as we shift from each resource and system. Therefore, rather than having multiple (cyber/fantasy) identities in place, there will be effective management systems that offer different combinations of identifiers

across different settings (such as are already established with the use of Digital Object Identifier (DOI) on the web since 1996[78]). Whilst this may be seen as a menacing and intrusive aspect of social media, such concerns are less prominent for those who already adhere to the seriously social, where such implications are seen as an expected consequence of the resources and accompanying sets of connections.

Living out such connectedness, I realise that I have not been as taken-aback by the growing ubiquity, and influence of the various settings of social media as if I had been a more at-a-distance observer. As such media have become ever more significant and essential, this has opened up debates about how such influences can or should be kept under control and revived older debates about the full effects of living such highly connected lives. Here we may begin to speculate about how such changes may shape how we manage our future relations. At first this seems to point towards a daunting prospect of change and the transformation of relationships; as one person commented on my blog, 'Someone once ignored a friend request and all I can tell you about them is that they were never heard of again'. In another way, the potential for sociability is something that has a renewed emphasis (such as we have already seen with the penetration of other communication technologies such as the telephone and letter). Indeed, the research in this study is informed by an emphasis on new modes of interaction that include Wall Posts, extensive messages and continuous Status Updates. Consequently it is with some relief that there is now a moment to note the mundane and ordinary aspects of the seriously social that is supported by the immediacy of social presence and the potentiality of social networks. It is

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[78] *Digital Object identifier (DOI) is 'a persistent identifier of intellectual property entities', or any object that can be usefully identified and has been available on the web. DOI is web-based global naming and resolution system for the precise identification and retrieval of digital items e.g. articles, books, images, data, videos, audio, and other electronic files. Development of the DOI system began in 1996 when 'content creators' and 'technologists' recognised information could not be commercially distributed on the Internet unless there was a common system for the unique identification for those objects (McGraw-Hill, 2003).*

my intention to draw attention to this idea of 'moment' to highlight how, as Gitelman and Pingree (2003:1, emphasis added) explain 'media' and their related consequences can be considered as 'meaningful' and 'new' at the 'moment, before the material means and the conceptual modes (...) become fixed' and when such media find themselves 'defined within a perceptual and semiotic economy that they then help to transform'. For this reason, rather than a conclusion – because networks and associated media by their very nature are never-ending – this chapter and my discussion should be viewed as another beginning. Prominence is given to the continuation of the connections that have already been put in place, which have formed an integral part of the research journey and resulted in the accumulation of networks of friends.

8.1 Living a seriously social life

The basis of the analysis is to draw on the mundane and everyday of lived experience which give value and meaning to interactions. Goffman (1963) reads social life as a continual state of performance. Social interaction is maintained as we are seen to perform different roles in different social settings. Across the complexities of social media, such mediated behaviour entails 'hard work' to maintain such performances, where there is a constant convergence of information across ongoing situations and new social settings. However, despite what can be considered as dynamic social surfaces and occasions, what has emerged out of this research is an emphasis upon the constancy of social behaviour fixed by a perception about appropriate social etiquette. In the Introduction I included an extract from my first posting from 'A Guide to Proper Facebook Etiquette' blog, where I published my speculation about whether the previous 'social courtesy held in such high acclaim has been replaced or simply abandoned'[79] by the users

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[79] *Taken from the posting entitled, 'New rules for surviving the digitally connected world', Tuesday, 12th June, 2007:*

of Facebook. Indeed, an at-a-distance observer might deduce that individuals have in a sense allowed traditional social values to slip away. Yet the course of this research has witnessed the emergence of a coming together, or new synthesis of social processes, as opposed to a conscious decision to act out or behave differently. A similar point was made by Meyrowitz (1985:1) in his assessment of the 'impact of electronic media on social behaviour' in the 1980s. Indeed, the kinds of social activities on Facebook that were first adopted by the participants in this study, and which then inevitably led to other social media, follow the same social conventions of roles and reference to social scripts with which we are already familiar. Thus, far from being 'new', such resources extend our styles of interaction and rather than being new models of behaviour they continue to broadcast the same social identifiers and dialogues. My approach seeks to identify how social media have become embedded into social worlds, as Gane and Beer (2008) consider, our relations cannot be explored without taking into account the broader social context and networks to which we are all a part. This understanding means that the mediation of social life should be viewed as being lived out across social media rather than as a separated form of online or offline engagement. Put simply, mundane reality is understood by the interactions shared with others and which form a wider set of social relations, both as they are sustained across social media and face-to-face.

I am reminded at this juncture about the 'concerns and fears', or 'hopes and dreams' of the technological power, in the first instance, of the internet and web. At the time, the words 'internet' and 'web' quickly became synonymous with 'all things possible' (Wellman and Hogan, 2004: 1). However, this perspective was also matched by an equally strong theme from initial commentaries about the threat to social relationships and society that would be replaced by 'cyber' relations, as in Forster's [1909] (2008) image of a dystopian future in The Machine Stops. More recently this has been recaptured by the anxieties about the continued intensity of internet use

221

defined as an 'addiction' (e.g. Young, 2004) as well as the potential 'damage' and negative consequences of SNSs, where Facebook has been the media's favourite icon (e.g. Joinson, 2008). In the past week (starting 20 October 2008) Facebook has been responsible for the following stories from the *Chicago Tribune*, *The Times* and *BBC news*, which are typical of the SNS's more negative press and 'mainstream' profile,

Figure 8.i Press image from *Chicago Tribune*[80]

Facebook child porn case results in 35-year federal prison term

Man, 25, posed as a girl, solicited boy and then threatened to post photos of minor

By Emily S. Achenbaum | Tribune reporter
October 22, 2008

Figure 8.ii Press image from *The Times*[81]

Facebook addiction can kill

The Blogumist www.laurencohen.co.za

A BRITISH woman has lost her life because of her Facebook addiction.

International news agencies reported this week that Wayne Forrester was upset to discover that his wife, Emma, had changed her online profile to "single", only days after he had moved out.

[80] *Story retrieved from:* http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-fox-lake-facebook-both-22-oct22,0,2137581.story
[81] *Story retrieved from:* http://www.thetimes.co.za/News/Article.aspx?id=867888

Figure 8.iii Press image from *BBC News*[82]

Man killed wife in Facebook row

A man has been jailed for life for stabbing his wife to death over a posting she made on the social networking site Facebook.

Wayne Forrester, 34, told police he was devastated that his wife Emma, also 34, had changed her online profile to "single" days after he had moved out.

The Old Bailey heard Forrester drove to her home in Croydon, south London, and attacked the mother-of-two.

He stabbed her with a kitchen knife and a meat cleaver on 18
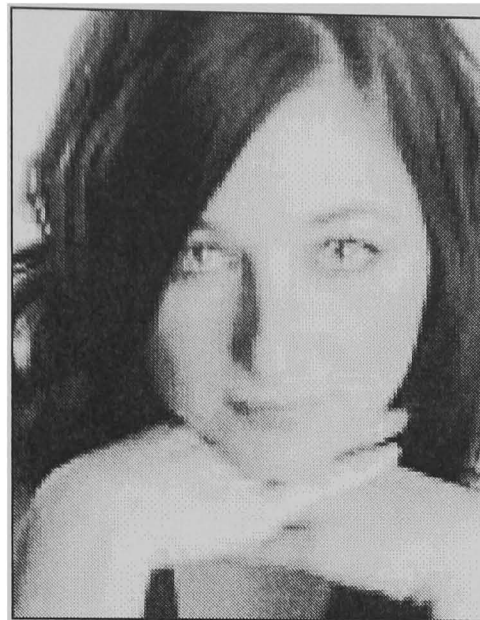
The mother-of-two's family was left devastated by her brutal murder

As the above screen shots show, SNSs have become popular vehicles for revealing the 'ills of society'. Here the security of everyday life is viewed as under threat and vulnerable as individuals seek to maximise or manipulate the relative openness of information and data across networks. The brief history of such resources suggests a trajectory of continued development and the emergence of new social opportunities and possible risks. Indeed, a constant of social media is the development of how individuals are willing to share information with others and how such data is organised for our own personal records. Where, at one level, information may be viewed as too restrictive for some, it appears as threateningly limitless for others (Joinera et al, 2007). For example, if we consider how in 2005 Facebook was a relatively unknown, and exclusive site for university students, a year later in 2006 the site had broadened as an open access platform. Today it is valued as a commercial resource and as a site for innovation. Hence, social media continues to emerge as an influential focus for those who use, track and spend time contributing information and participating with others in so

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82 *Story retrieved from:* http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/7676285.stm

223

doing. As a result, such connections provide a progressive and creative social base one that encourages individuals to share, collaborate and participate with others. This is part of a particular cultural milieu, which focuses on the creative production and sharing of information with others.

8.2 Creative production of the social

As we move out of 2008 and into 2009 (some twenty years after cyberspace), a new dynamic model of the digital landscape is developing. The traditional lines between what, in the past, constituted a website, a forum, or a chatroom have become blurred as these converge across platforms and devices. Within this social setting, presence is essential for interaction and an awareness of others. Indeed, the main way individuals 'stay informed' and broadcast to others their social lives is based on an openness that is inherently participatory. Part of the nature of the research is that it has been emergent and represents a continuous story of the genuine sets of associations that have real consequences in the lives of the users of social media. In this way my own involvement and participation across social networks represents a significant part of the same story as people continue to seek to link and foster relationships with others. Here social production and the reciprocation of links structure shared networks and sociability. I am reminded of Putnam's (1993; 1995) widely-read take on withdrawal from civic engagement and the decline of social capital in society, from this perspective the potential role of social media is the way it brings people who have a 'common cause' together. A prime example is the way that SNSs, and Facebook in particular, have been used in the American 2008 Presidential campaigns. Indeed, part of the apparent measures of success of the Democrat campaign has been the social connections mobilised across Facebook in support for the Democrat candidate Barack Obama (Savage, 2008). Here social opportunities are, in effect, constantly bought into the open where the display of action is contingent upon, and has value through shared meaning. For example, my own Profile on Facebook shows (despite

224

being a British resident) that I support the Obama campaign, where I am listed as a 'Fan' on their Fan Page – which means I receive Feeds from campaign updates direct to my Facebook account such as the one displayed below. Others in my network can observe that I am a supporter, as the Feed is also displayed on my Profile Page.

Figure 8.iv Image from Facebook Feed

* **Special video from Barack**
From Barack Obama

Election Day is in exactly two weeks.

But right now, we're facing an urgent deadline that will determine exactly where we can compete -- and how fiercely -- in the final push.

Barack recorded a... (read more)

Yesterday at 6:58pm | Opt Out | Report Spam
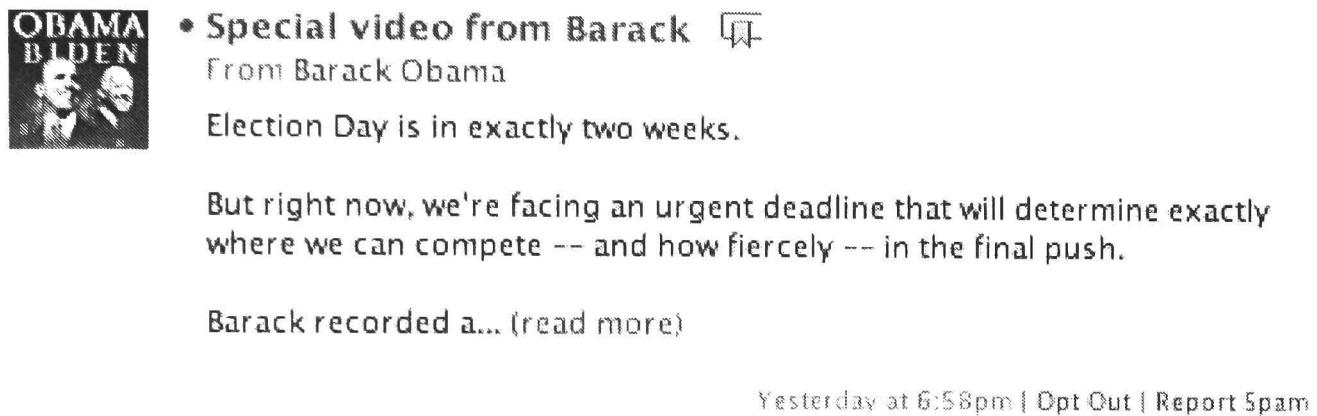
Sterling (2004) envisages such actions as 'a reason to be'. Published before the launch of Facebook, Sterling (2004) goes on to describe digital interactions, claiming 'It's like networking. Networking is another word for not-working. But boy, we sure have to do a lot of it'. From Sterling's (2004) perspective,

> 'We are facing a future world infested with digital programmability. A world where our structures and possessions include, as a matter of course, locaters, timers, identities, histories, origins, and destinations: sensing, logic, actuation, and displays. Loops within loops. Cycles within cycles'.

Or, more appropriate in 2008, our social networks within networks, which form the basis for the *creative production of the social.*

Through such network productivity entrepreneurs and enthusiasts have extended not only their social, but also work, business and career opportunities. One prime example that has been influential to my own connections was the introduction to the Girl Geek Network and Founder

225

Sarah Blow in July 2007. Sarah had set up the Girl Geek Network in 2005, which is sustained by the associated GirlyGeekdom blog[83] (see image below), Girl Geek Dinners[84] as well as the related Girl Geek Facebook Group(s) and Fan Page.

Figure 8.v Image from Girl Geekdom blog
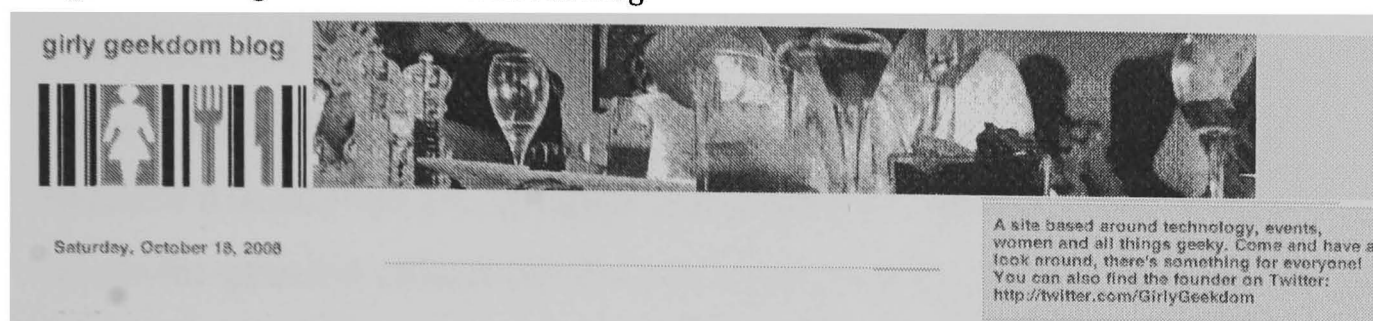
Sarah's intention was to form a network of links that supported others she identified with as 'Girl Geeks'. In discussion with Sarah she identified that 'Girl Geeks' were women who were 'persistent' in their use and 'enthusiasm' of technology, and who were also likely to be working in the technology industry. For Sarah being a 'Girl Geek', is 'not about 'being geeky'' (SB), but represents a particular mode of being, or, as she identified 'a way of life' (SB) as the most engaged users of technology. Notwithstanding the emphasis on 'Girl Geeks', Sarah makes it clear that her connections are not at the exclusion of 'Guy Geeks', but instead to highlight a particular emphasis on women as they, 'tend to be less visible in the technology industry, or assumed to be either 'non', 'lacking in ability' or 'unconfident' as users of technology. Unless, Sarah offered, 'they (the women) are assumed to be in PR or marketing or someone's secretary' (SB). Sarah recognises that she is a 'high user of technology' (SB), where such connections are 'second nature' (SB) for her, and hence intrinsic to both her work and social life. Therefore, what in another context has been described as a dualism between social and working life is not appropriate for users of social media like Sarah (e.g. Hochschild, 1997; Ransome, 1996). Here connections have fed into other associations

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[83] http://girlygeekdom.blogspot.com/
[84] http://londongirlgeekdinners.co.uk/?page_id=4

226

and held open the opportunity for new encounters. Part of what I have already argued in Chapters Five and Six is how the embracing of new connections are as an extensions of established social relationships and which are intrinsic to the seriously social sensibility of those in this study. This same sensibility is also apparent, in varying degrees of intensity, in other users that occupy the same social networks. Indeed, one way that my own Facebook networks became mobilised was the introductions to other 'alike' users of the social media such as the Girl Geeks. This is significant because it reinforces the assumptions about the types of networks and taken-for-granted utilisation of social media that is a feature of everyday life that is also a characteristic of the research participants. This lays emphasis both on the increased popularity of SNSs and related social media, as well as how each is enacted through certain expected modes of social participation.

The Girl Geek Network, the GirlyGeekdom blog, and accompanying Profiles on Twitter and Facebook provide a continual flow of interactive and coordinated information. This sustained social presence shares a mutual focus on networks and active attentiveness to the connections that were first raised by the research participants. To return to the characteristics of the 'seriously social', a significant part of such behaviour is the assumption that things happen quickly and propel other social actions forward. After my introduction to Sarah in July (which came about on Facebook, via a reconnection to an 'old' secondary school friend) I was invited to attend the 'Girl Geek Second Anniversary Dinner' in London in mid-August 2007. As I have previously outlined in Chapter Six, individuals are anchored in their material identities, which reflect actions that occur across social media in the form of profile presence. The Girl Geek Network provides a key model of how these associations have developed as a part of network-led connections that go on to permeate across both the informal social, and more formal working, life. The Girl Geek Dinners are pitched as 'social events' that focus on promoting the visibility of women in the technology industry. The events

are Worldwide and currently held in over 36 countries, hosted in major cities, which include, London, Melbourne, Milan, San Francisco and Tokyo. The London Girl Geek Second-Anniversary Dinner provided opportunity to talk with other members of this particular network of connections, and users of social media technology. It was at the event that I met Rachel, who had graduated from university the previous year, and explained that,

> *'I'm a big user of technology (...) my friends say that I'm notorious on Facebook! It's a natural part of my life, work and friend life, to be connected. When I started working in IT I heard about the Girl Geeks. My interest and work in this area meant that it was natural for me to be involved (...) I read the blog, comment sometimes and try to go to as many Girl Geek Dinners as I can'* (GG.1).

Rachel refers to living a 'networky life' and described what she termed as a set of 'misconceptions' from others who did not share her own 'enthusiasm' and use of social media (GG.1). She went on to outline how,

> *'The misconception is that you don't know what you're doing, or that sending a message on Facebook is too informal compared with email. That's simply not the case anymore, and people need to catch up and onto this. What's worse is when people assume that by using Facebook and Twitter you're wasting time. It's the opposite, this is how we communicate, and this is how we stay in touch. Look at everyone here, you can see that they are meeting new people, and they're updating their Twitter at the same time (...) that doesn't mean that they are not here, or what's going on isn't important. If anything it makes it more important as its worthwhile to post to Twitter or Facebook (...) eventually everyone else will have to catch up'* (GG.1).

For Rachel it is 'a given' (GG.1) that her own presence is pervasive and access is obtainable, or rather taken to be ubiquitous. During our conversation, Rachel maintained her presence on Twitter and Facebook, with updates to her TwitterFeed via her mobile phone. In this sense, Rachel shares with the research participants (like David in Chapter Seven) some of the assumptions about how 'this is just the way things are', and that such connectedness was

an, 'inevitable' (Y.36) consequence of using social networks. Indeed, Rachel noted how,

> *'I'm aware that I'm a higher technology user than my family, but this will all be normal for everyone soon (...) Everyone in my generation is using social networks this way! '* (GG.1).

Most noticeable from Rachel's discussion is her heightened attention to the details of her involvement in networks. She distinguished herself as, 'socially led, and technology conscious' and her reference to 'my generation' (GG.1) has echoes of the popular label Generation Y I described in Chapter Two. At this point it is persuasive to follow Rachel's own interpretation, that eventually 'everyone' else will 'have to catch up' (GG.1) and will share the readiness, and understanding of the same technologies. At best such perspectives represent an overly enthusiastic, rather than sweeping statement. However, what is of significance is how such 'inevitable' trajectories are based on the social behaviour of others, rather than the conventions or functionality of the technology. To return to my discussion about Thrift (2005) in Chapter Two, technology does not determine social behaviour, rather it is through social behaviour that technology becomes fused and embedded within everyday routines and a part of expected social conventions. In spite of this, I do not want to suggest an assumed 'conventionality' of such behaviour. I am aware that what appears as conventional in this study also represents new and unchartered territories of sociability for others. What I do want to draw attention to is how such social practices unite existing social structures and processes. Such network associations force us to find appropriate attitudes and adopt particular social techniques to resist the misinterpretation of meaning and uncomfortable challenging of others. Thus, to a certain extent we are free to 'experiment' with our 'new' way of life, but only in so far that our behaviour and practices adhere to our already accepted associations with others. The possibility for what previously has been depicted as cyberspace to in effect pull the rug

from beneath our feet, is met by what I describe as a *cultural particularism* based on established values and grounded universalisms.

8.3 Cultural particularism

My link to the Girl Geek network is significant, as it exemplifies the shift in the shape and types of engagement across social media resources. It is also indicative of the way assumptions about what I propose as a shared sensibility is used to facilitate interactions and the development of new associations. For example, other attendees mentioned how they had met 'new friends' via the Girl Geek Network, and also sought to sustain work-based associations using the same social media resources. For Rachel and another attendee, Maria, they shared how it was 'common practice' (GG.1/GG.2) for them give out their Facebook details, rather than 'work' emails when they met someone new in a business context. Described in this way, interactivity is about how individuals are prepared to 'give up' information and data as they interact with others across social media. Gane and Beer (2008: 152) suggest that such 'media interactivity' is not as simple as a 'technical phenomenon (...) but as something that has an intimate and complex connection'. Such sustained use of social media represent the types of interactions that are sustained at the higher end of the continuum that I speculated about earlier. Indeed, as the leading users of social media, the Girl Geeks and research participants seek to stratify all aspects of their lives across social media resources and have expectations that others will do the same. This is a recursive process that builds into other encounters and sets of relations, framed as a cultural particularism – such behaviour is indicative of the lives of the most engaged and confident users of social media.

At the beginning of the 'Information Age', Holloway and Valentine (2003: 153) observed, most commentaries focussed on the "big' dramatic stories about the alleged impact of ICT'. This research, like theirs, describes the 'mundane' and ordinary. Initial enthusiasm for what was heralded as 'new

media' by the internet and cyberspace typically embraced broad and largely under-researched claims about the way mediated technology opened up new prospects for identity, sociability and community (Haraway, 1991; Rheingold 1993; Turkle, 1995), such views assumed technology would promote social change. A key point of interest in this study is the consequences of connections with others, as a *continuation* of social relations and processes. However, it is necessary to recognise the limitation of such connections and resources as these account for a specific group of users who are possessed with the same type of engagement and awareness of the potentiality of social media resources. Furthermore, the analysis has converged around a positive sensibility reinforced by a capacity to create and support social connections, which lack negative consequences. In this context, the data has the advantage of incorporating key insights from the social leaders in this particular field, who treat the social as an emergent extension of existing social reality. In this way social media is positioned within, and orientated toward, the social milieu of the self and display of presence based on the *always*-constant connection *with* others. For example, from my Profile on Facebook I have encountered alike networked others who have been curious to share with me their own take (both personal and professional) on the consequences of social media. One connection that is particularly appropriate for this understanding was my introduction to Oliver Mardling in August 2007. Oliver presented himself to me via a message on Facebook, following a Group I had formed on the site about a conference at the University of York, promoted as 'Toward a Social Science of Web 2.0' in September 2007. My opening with Oliver represents not only the potentiality of social media in terms of the opportunities to connect to others, but also holds particular interest in terms of the social vigilance of both known and unknown others. For Oliver, I was 'of interest' because I shared enthusiasm for the same technologies, further upheld by my involvement and occupation of the same network spaces. Oliver was also motivated by a professional interest, where he was in the early stages of refining a new SNS called

'WhatTalent[85]', a SNS for professionals in the media industry tagged as 'The Internet Hub for the Creative World' (see image below).

Figure 8.vi Image of WhatTalent main page, October 2008
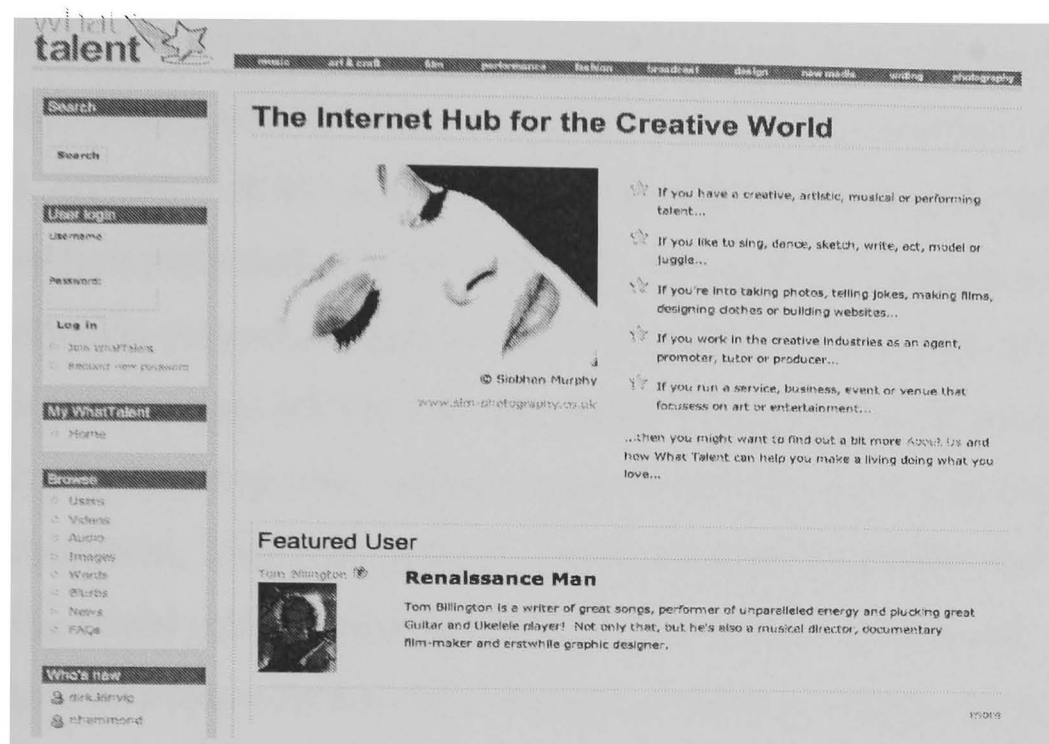
Both the Girl Geek and WhatTalent networks have as their base broad cultural principles centred on a view of society that has been influenced by the Information Age and development of shared and open resources as self-sustaining models of networks. Here the emphasis is on a social model of production as part of participatory and collectively led actions as well as the commercial application of creativity and potential of social enterprise. The cultural commentator Charles Leadbeater (2008) has already acknowledged such creativity being channelled by 'cultural entrepreneurs' and social opportunists, resources that he utilised in the 'collaborative writing' of his book 'We Think', which was displayed and co-written with others who made contributions via his website[86]. My interest here is not so much in the details of such organisations or initiatives, but with an understanding of the collective significance of such resources as they are sustained by the

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[85] _http://www.whattalent.com/_
[86] _http://www.wethinkthebook.net/home.aspx_

characteristics of a seriously social sensibility. It should be recognised that 'sensibility' is not a precise categorisation of social behaviour, rather I refer to this term to describe the sense of shared social norms and values that are best understood as malleable constructs within particular cultural narratives. In this context, constantly active networks are lifeless without participation within and the display of lived out experiences across various resources. Indeed, it is when we consider how such resources are woven into the pattern and rhythm of daily life that they gather momentum and hold a particular compulsiveness at the centre of their social influence. This is how I began to approach my own connections, on the basis of their potentiality for building into everyday actions and encounters as a new form of social condition. Thus, the processes of becoming acquainted and maintaining social relations are articulated in terms of a compelled sociability to be *always* aware and *always* connected to others. Such compulsion was at the forefront of my first meeting with Walid al Saqqaf, a self-proclaimed 'entrepreneur' and co-founder of the review site TrustedPlaces[87] (see figure 8.vii).

Figure 8.vii Image from TrustedPlaces main page, October 2008

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[87] http://trustedplaces.com/
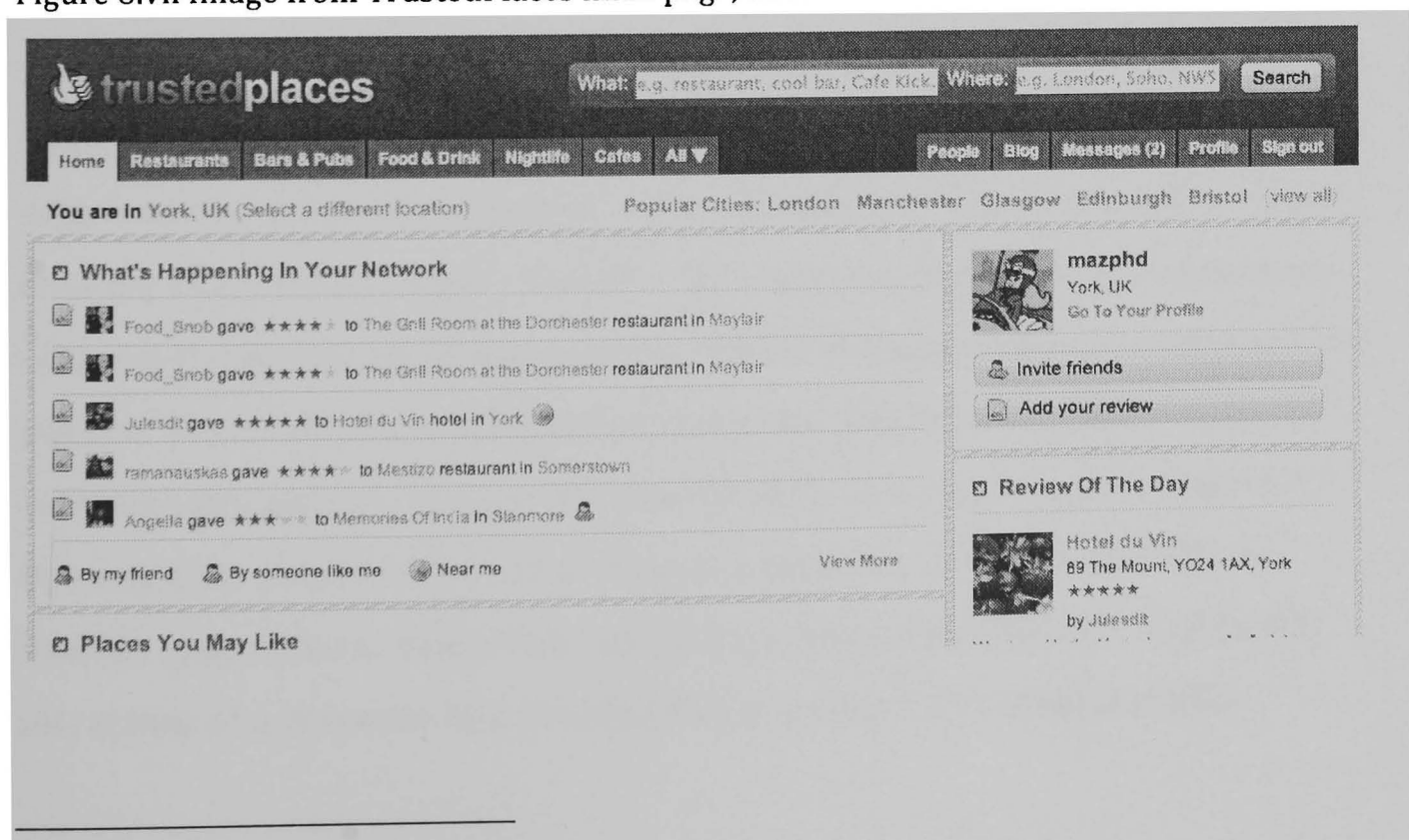
One of the dimensions of the seriously social sensibility that I have referred to, is the openness and ubiquity of access. Whilst the Girl Geek and WhatTalent networks are a public resource, in that anyone is welcome to join, these clearly have a specialised dimension with emphasis on the female users of technology or those working in the cultural and arts professions. As originally an alumni network, Facebook was also initially founded on a similar specialisation of links. TrustedPlaces displays opinions about restaurants, bars, clubs, hotels etc. After setting up a Profile, users can link to one another as 'friends', to upload, rate and search for reviews (see 'What' and 'Where' search boxes, figure 8.vii). They can also contribute to the site by posting their own reviews of named places, which are given a starred rating out of five, and made public to others on the site. For example, a particular restaurant or other venue within specific localities can be searched for within the site, and the information about it displayed.

I was introduced to Walid al Saqqaf at my second Girl Geek Dinner in October 2007. TrustedPlaces is pitched as a 'community of real people (...) who enjoy discovering and sharing opinions about places'[88]. The network is underpinned by the shared sense of connectedness between users, 'of which trust is the most important part' (Walid). In this context it is the implicit 'trusted connections' that are supported by the network sensibility of users, who 'want to share their reviews with their friends, because its fun and that's how we share information' (Walid). This lays emphasis on the interactions of the individual as an integral social element within a network connected to others. There are also assumptions about the way in which users 'want to' retrieve information, 'because its fun' (Walid). Here prominence is given to the way that people make use of their connections, summed up nicely by Walid's supposition, 'that's how we share information' (Walid). Part of the attraction of a resource like TrustedPlaces is that it is a social hub that

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[88] *Taken from the 'About Page' on TrustedPlaces.com,* http://trustedplaces.com/docs/about.

234

updates daily and where interactions can occur in 'real time'. Since joining TrustedPlaces in October 2007, I have written and contributed to over 128 reviews (and counting). In addition my presence on TrustedPlaces is counterbalanced by the corresponding actions and encounters that I am connected to in other networks. For example, my Profile Page on Facebook displays my reviews from TrustedPlaces and Twitter updates, the page also has a link to my personal website, which in-turn links to my blogs, and accompanying Girl Geek and TrustedPlaces Profiles, which again all feedback into one other. To be a part of a network on TrustedPlaces includes connections that may go beyond the immediate or already known social associations. Indeed, whilst the general capacity of Girl Geeks', WhatTalent's and TrustedPlaces' networks can be viewed as limited by the particular stratification of the network, as an organisation, SNS or user-review site, what is striking is how these resources are shaped by what I term as 'networks of mutuality'. Here social engagement is based on the perceived mutual presence of others (cf. Goffman, 1963), and the value of this connection. For example, my participation with the Girl Geeks contained an inherent reciprocated dimension, which facilitated further encounters and social opportunities across into other networks. The same kind of sociability is also notable on TrustedPlaces, whose users act in response to others with shared comments, tags attached to reviews and comments posted to the sites blog. Such actions shape the engagement of others and encourage the (re)circulation of information which can also be broadcast into other resources. This upholds my conceptualisation of a particular sensibility that holds both cultural and social appeal – here there is a concern to engage with the cultural mainstream as a route to sociability and personal contribution.

8.4 End...

'His own enjoyment, or his own ease, was, in every particular, his ruling
principle'

(Jane Austen ([1811] 1999), *Sense and Sensibility*)

This thesis has focussed on the everyday mundaneness when the most
connected and confident users of social media come together. Rather than
focus of grand social change about the alleged impact of such technology, this
research has tend the small-scale and more intimate interactions to reveal
the recognition of social etiquette and social management of connections
based on the perception of the self as always connected *with* others. This is a
strategy that highlights the capacity for opening up new social dimensions,
such as some of the shared dilemmas in shaping social media interactions
and new opportunities for sociability. Manifest as a seriously social
sensibility such everyday practice brings forth progression in how
individuals interact and find themselves included and/or excluded from
social activities. With the findings of the research this does not support some
of the more critical commentaries about the harmful and isolating effects of
such technology. Instead the participants describe a growing awareness of
the potentiality of such connectivity and significance as others present in
other social networks, e.g. parents and work colleagues, take up the same
technology. This significance is captured in the words of one participant who
gave voice to others with the same concern that to be without Facebook, or
other related social media, would leave them feeling 'isolated' and ultimately
'in the dark' (M.14.i). A key point of interest for this research is the resulting
long-tail effects of the seriously social. Thus far this is presented in a mostly
positive manner. As this sensibility is absorbed into the everyday not just by
the most enthusiastic of social media users, but by institutions and
government the various competencies to be able to manage social
information becomes a site that can and/or *should* be mutually contested
where it is strongly related to the awareness of the individual to manage

236

their own data. Finally, the research demonstrates anxieties about social media, shared information and surveillance. The young people in this study presuppose that they use and have access to technology in a 'safe' and protected way, a confidence that suggests a balance and/or enhancement to social activities shared with others in this way. However, it is important, on reflection, not to let the seriously social deflect attention from what for other not so confident users represent at times challenging with potentially disquietening social effects. Ultimately this research recognises the importance of the extent to which identities and relationships are reproduced as a part of shared social information. The organisation, negotiation and realisation of the self and social activities is a process in a continual cycle of renewal and revitalisation as social elements converge in a complex and continuous manner. This is evident of the *constant* 'need to know' what is going on and therefore the identification of relationships with others. Here the mutual process of social interactions as they are anticipated and (hopefully) carried out give meaning to and influence the direction of relationships. This demonstrates how ideas informed by the framing of appropriate social etiquette compel social interaction forward and is dependent upon the interchange of communication with others. These social practices reinforce, and occasionally are seen to compete, understandings of successful interaction. As a result the social consequences of the dimensions of the seriously social sensibility give reason for further academic attention shaped by the processes experienced within and around such prevalent use and sharing of technology. Above all, as I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, the understandings of such sociability *in situ* and as a part of the same networks is essential to the translation of the meaning of the social actions of the participants, whilst at the same time these are suggestive of the influences and changes that are yet to come.

To sum up, the main qualities of the seriously social involve a continual assessment, access and awareness of friends' information that is assumed to

be in real time and consequently demand immediate attention. Where this study had begun with an interest in how social networks were sustained during a time of transition, what has emerged from the data is a sense of the complementary strengths (and weaknesses) of social networks that have been captured by an engagement with, and acquired knowledge about, social media. Had I begun with a more 'at distance' and less involved research agenda I may have missed the everyday significance of social media resources that now continue to extend beyond the bounds of university networks and are present within a range of social lives. The resulting sets of behavioural techniques used to sustain and manage interactions have become, like Goffman's (1963) interactional rules, mundane expectations about everyday interactions. Indeed, the very nature of the pervasiveness of the networks, that have been cultivated since the research commenced in 2005, has allowed me to sustain contact with the majority of the respondents for the course of the study. Many of those who have been involved, from both the Universities of York and Melbourne are classified as Facebook friends with whom, to this day, I share frequent contact. Therefore, to signify an 'end point' to the research is difficult in this context, as my presence is involved and entrenched across more than one network, and it is expected that this presence will be sustained. Goffman (1963) notes about his own investigations that,

> 'Somehow, but only somehow a brief time span is involved, a limited extension of space, and a restriction to those events that must go on to completion once they have begun' (1963: 1).

By comparison, this chapter considers the unlimited extension of the research investigations. Where, like others in the study, as a social actor I have chosen to continue my connections and participation across into other networks. This makes it harder to indicate what should be held as the expected 'completion' of my investigations 'once they have begun' (Goffman, 1963:1), and it is precisely this complexity that has led me to propose the seriously social as a particular sensibility. This could also be a point about

the jurisdiction of sociology, where one can speculate about whether social media offers also a *'seriously social research sensibility'* where researchers can use such tools to map, model and examine the topography of networks. In effect now we are all 'social network analysers', both of our own networks and our actions that are also a feature of others networks. Indeed, to find an endpoint to this discussion, is to recognise that the seriously social does not come to an end when the participants, as university students, leave for the world of work, when I finish writing this chapter, or when you finish reading this thesis.

Appendix A.1 the University of Melbourne interview data table

Code	Sex	Subject	Year	Resident/International Student	Accommodation	Social Media
M.1	F	Art History	1	Australian	Private residence	3 Mobiles, blog, webpage, MySpace, email, PDA, MSN, SKYPE (online business)
M.2	M	Mathematics	2	International exchange student from UK	College Square	2 Mobiles, email, MSN, SKYPE, landline
M.3	F	Economics and DML	1	International student from Japan	College Square	2 Mobiles, email, Mixi, SKYPE, MSN
M.4	F	Theatre Studies and Art	2	Australian	Private residence with 3 others	2 Mobiles, landline, email, MySpace, webpage, (online business)
M.5	F	History and DML	3	Australian	Private residence with 4 others	Email, landline
M.6	M	Economics	1	International student from Japan	College Square	3 Mobiles, email, SKYPE, MSN, Mixi,
M.7	M	Economics	2	International student from Japan	College Square	2 Mobiles, email, SKYPE, MSN, Mixi
M.8	M	Law	2	Australian	Trinity College	3 Mobiles, landline, email, Facebook, MSN (online business)
M.9	F	English	1	Australian	Ormond College	Mobile, email

M.10	F	Social work	1	Australian	Living at home with parents	Mobile, MySpace, Facebook, landline, MSN, email
M.11	F	Biology	1	International student Japan	Trinity College	2 Mobiles, email, MSN, postcards
M.12	M	Economics and Politics	2	International student New Zealand	Ormond College	Mobile, email, Facebook, landline,
M.13.i	F	Theatre studies and English	1	Australian	Trinity College	Mobile, email, landline
M.14.i	M	Economics	2	International exchange student US	College Square with girlfriend	2 Mobiles, email, SKYPE, , postcards, blog, webpage
M.15.i	F	History	1	Australian	Trinity College	Mobile, MSN, , landline, email
M.16.i	F	Mathematics	2	International student US	College Square	2 Mobiles, MSN, , email, SKYPE
M.17	F	Biology	1	Australian	Trinity College	Mobile, email, MSN, MySpace, ,
M.18	F	Art	1	Australian	Trinity College	Mobile, email, MSN, MySpace,
M.19	F	Mathematics	1	Australian	College Square	Mobile, email
M.20	F	Mathematics	1	International student China	Ormond College	Mobile, email, Mixi, MySpace, Facebook, , blog, MSN, Yahoo Messenger
M.21	M	Computer Science	2	Australian	Ormond College	Mobile, landline, , email
M.22	F	Art	2	International exchange student Holland	Private Residence	2 Mobiles, email, SKYPE, postcards,
M.23	F	Music	1	International exchange	Private Residence	2 Mobiles, email, SKYPE, postcards,

				student Holland		
M.24.i	M	Mathematics	2	International student Taiwan	College Square	2 Mobiles, email, **Mixi, MSN**
M.25	M	Mathematics	2	International student Taiwan	College Square	2 Mobiles, email, **Mixi**, MSN
M.26	F	Mathematics and DML	1	International student Taiwan	College Square	Mobile, email, MSN
M.27	F	Biology	2	Australian	Trinity College	Mobile, landline, Facebook, MSN, email
M.28	F	Chemistry	1	Australian	Trinity College	Mobile, landline, Facebook, MSN, email
M.29	F	Economics	1	Australian	Ormond College	Mobile, MySpace, email, MSN, landline
M.30	F	Music	2	Australian	Private residence and lives at home with parents at w/e	Mobile, landline
M.31.iii	F	Art	2	Australian	Private Residence with boyfriend	Mobile, landline, email
M.32	M	Economics	2	Australian	College Square	Mobile, landline, email (v.occasionally)
M.33	F	Psychology and Art	1	Australian	Ormond College	Mobile, MSN, Facebook, MySpaace, email, SKYPE, landline
M.34	F	Economics and Business Law	3	Australian	Ormond College	SKYPE, MSN, 3 Mobiles, landline, Facebook, email, (v. connected, family and girlfriend overseas)
M.35	M	Sports Science, Economics and Business	3	Australian	Private Residence	3 Mobiles, email, landline

M.36	M	Economics and History	3	International student from US	Private Residence	2 Mobiles, landline, email, SKYPE, MSN, , postcards
M.37	M	Biology and Law	2	International student from Taiwan	Ormond College	2 Mobiles, email, SKYPE, MSN
M.38	F	Arts History	2	Australian	Ormond College	Mobile, Facebook, email, MSN, landline (when at parents home), postcards
M.39	M	Mathematics	3	Australian	Private Residencem lives alone	Mobile and email
M.40	M	Law	2	Australian	Trinity College	Mobile, Facebook, email, landline, MSN
M.41	F	Science	1	International student Japan	Trinity College	2 Mobiles, Mixi, , email, SKYPE
M.42	F	Science and DML	1	International student Japan	Trinity College	3 Mobiles, Mixi, MySpace, , email, SKYPE

Total no. of participants: 42

Appendix A.2 the University of York interview data table

Code	Sex	Subject	Year	Resident/International Student	Accommodation	Social Media
Y.1	M	Chemistry	3	British	Langwith College	2 Mobiles, PDA, Facebook (nominally), email, landline
Y.2	M	Sociology	2	British	Alcuin College	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, landline
Y.3	F	Psychology	1	British	Alcuin College	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, landline
Y.4	M	Computer Science	1	British	Derwent College	2 Mobiles, Facebook, email, landline, MSN, webcam
Y.5	M	Sociology	1	British	Goodrick College	3 Mobiles, Facebook, MSN, MySpace, landline, webcam, PDA, website, blog,
Y.6	F	History	1	British	Alcuin College	2 Mobiles, Facebook (uni), MySpace (home), email, landline
Y.7	F	Art	1	British	Derwent College	1 Mobiles, landline (nan) Facebook (uni), Bebo (home), email
Y.8	F	Medical Student	1	British	Vanbrugh College	1 Mobile, email, landline
Y.9	F	Economics	1	British	Alcuin College	Mobile, Facebook, email, landline

Y.10	M	Sociology	1	British	Derwent College	Mobile, Facebook, email
Y.11	F	History	1	British	Alcuin College	Mobile, Facebook, MySpace, Flickr email
Y.12	F	English	1	British	Vanbrugh College	Mobile, Facebook, Bebo, MySpace, email
Y.13	F	History	1	British	Goodricke College	Mobile, Facebook, email
Y.14	F	Chemistry	1	British	Goodricke College	Mobile, MySpace, Facebook, FLickr, Twitter, Bebo, email
Y.15	M	Computer Science	2	British	Private Residence	Mobile, Facebook, MySpace, email, landline
Y.16	F	History	1	British	Private Residence	Mobile, Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, email (occasionally), MySpace,
Y.17	F	Art politics	1	British	Halifax College	Mobile, Facebook, email
Y.18	F	Librarian MA	1	British	Wentworth College	Mobile, Facebook, Twitter, email,
Y.19	M	Science	1	British	Alcuin College	Mobile, Facebook, email
Y.20	M	Computing Science	1	British	Vanbrugh College	Mobile, Facebook, Twitter, email
Y.21	M	Mathematics and Computing	1	British	Vanbrugh College	Mobile, Facebook, email
Y.22	F	Art History	1	British	Derwent College	Mobile, Facebook
Y.23	M	History and Politics	2	International Student from	Private Residence	Mobile, Facebook, Twitter, email

					Taiwan		
Y.24	F	Sociology	1	British	Halifax College	Mobile, Facebook, Twitter, email
Y.25	M	Sociology	3	British	Alcuin College	Mobile, email
Y.26	F	Biology	1	British	Derwent College	Mobile, Facebook, email, MSN
Y.27	F	Psychology	1	British	Langwith College	Mobile, Facebook, email, MSN, SKYPE
Y.28	M	Literature	1	International Student from Norway	Wentworth	Mobile, email, Twitter, landline (home Norway)
Y.29	M	Music	1	British	Private Residence	Mobile, email, Facebook, , landline
Y.30	M	Sports Science	1	International Student from Sweden	Private Residence	Mobile, email, Facebook
Y.31	M	Architecture	2	British	Alcuin College	Mobile, Facebook, email, landline
Y.32	M	Sociology	1	British	Derwent College	Mobile, Facebook, MySpace, email, landline
Y.33	F	Business Management MA	1	International Student from Japan	Derwent College	Mobile, Facebook, email (only family)
Y.34	M	Sociology	1	British	Derwent College	Mobile, Facebook, Landline, MySpace, Twitter,
Y.35	F	History and Architecture	1	British	Wentworth College	Mobile, Facebook, email, landline, Twitter,

Y.36	M	Economics and Business Management	1	British	Vanbrugh College	Mobile, Facebook, MySpace, email, landline
Y.37	F	Sociology	2	International Student from America	Vanbrugh College	Mobile, Facebook, blog, MySpace (unused) Flickr, YouTube, email, Landline, SideKick, Website
Y.38	M	Mathematics	1	British, family in India	Goodrick College	Mobile, Facebook, MySpace, Landline, Flickr, YouTube, CraigsList (London and USA), Website, 3 blogs, email, Twitter,
Y.39	M	Computer Science	3	British	Halifax College	Mobile, Facebook, Landline, email, blog, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, also runs own website that connects community of artists in London
Y.40	M	Computer Science	1	British	Halifax College	Mobile, Facebook, Bebo, MySpace, Friendster, Flickr, Twitter, YouTube, 2 blogs, TrustedPlaces, email, Landline
Y.41	F	Journalism and media	2	British	Derwent College	Mobile, Facebook (only 2 months), Flickr, YouTube, Linkedin (searches only), email, Landline, Twitter,

Y.42	F	Communication and Media	1	British	Private Residence lives at home with mother	Mobile, Facebook, MySpace, Flickr, YouTube, email,
Y.42i	F	Mother of Y.42				Landline, mobile, Facebook
Y.43	F	Art	2	International Student from Italy	Wentworth College	Mobile, Facebook, 2 blogs, email, Landline, website,
Y.44	M	Communication and Media	3	International Student from France	Private Residence, Paris and London	3 mobiles, SideKick, 3 Websites, helping to run a StartUp, hosts 3 blogs, Facebook, MySpace, Trusted Places, Flickr, YouTube, Twitter, Landline, 4 email accounts
Y.45	M	Science	2	International Student from Sweden	Private Residence (shared with Y.53)	Facebook, MySpace, email, Mobile, Landline, Twitter,
Y.46	F	English Literature	1	International Student from America	Halifax College	Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, Mobile, Landline, LiveJournal, Flickr, YouTube, email, Twitter,
Y.47	M	Computing	2	British	Alcuin College	Facebook, MySpace, hosts 2 groups on FB, Flickr, YouTube, LiveJournal, contributes to Assignment Zero, Trusted Places, email, Twitter,

Y.48	M	Computer Science	1	British	Halifax College	Facebook, YouTube, email, Landline, 2 mobiles, Flickr,
Y.49	M	Communication	1	British	Langwith College	Facebook, Trusted Places, YouTube, Flickr, 3 blogs, email, Mobile, Landline
Y.50	F	History	2	British	Alcuin College	Facebook, runs the Glasshouse website, YouTube, MySpace, Trusted Places, email, Moo, Mobile, Flickr, Bebo,
Y.51	F	Psychology	1	British	Private residence	Facebook, MySpace, 2 blogs, Mobile, Landline
Y.52	M	Computing Science	2	British	Langwith College	Facebook, MySpace, Moo, 3 websites, 2 blogs, 3 FB groups, Mobile, Landline
Y.53	M	Computing Science	4	British	Private residence (shared with Y.45)	Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, email, Landline (doesn't really use), Mobile, Twitter,
Y.54	M	Sociology	3	British	Derwent College	Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Mobile, email, 2 FB groups, 1 blog, Twitter,

Total: 54 participants

249

Appendix A.3 the University of Melbourne focus group data table

Code	Sex	Subject	Year	Resident/International Student	Accommodation	Social Media
M.Gp.1.i	M	Economics	1	New Zealand	Ormond College	1 Mobile, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Website, landline
M.Gp.1.ii	M	Law	1	Australian	Ormond College	3 Mobiles, Facebook, email,
M.Gp.1.iii	M	Psychology	1	Australian	Ormond College	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, Flickr, YouTube landline
M.Gp.1.iiii	M	History	1	Australian	Ormond College	2 Mobiles, Facebook, landline
M.Gp.2.i	F	Law	1	Australian	Trinity College	1 Mobile, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Website, landline
M.Gp.2.ii	F	Law	1	Australian	Trinity College	2 Mobiles, Facebook, email, Flickr YouTube, landline
M.Gp.2.iii	F	French	1	Australian	Ormond College	1 Mobile, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, blog, landline
M.Gp.3.i	M	Law	1	Australian	Trinity College	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, Flickr, landline
M.Gp.3.ii	M	Law	1	Australian	Trinity College	2 Mobiles, Facebook, email, Flickr YouTube,

| M.Gp.3.iii | F | Law | 1 | Australian | Trinity College | 3 Mobiles, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, blog |
| M.Gp.3.iiii | F | Law | 1 | Australian | College Square | 1 Mobile, Facebook, email, Flickr, YouTube, blog, landline |

M.Gp.4.i	M	Law	1	Australian	Trinity College	2 Mobiles, Facebook, Flickr, landline
M.Gp.4.ii	M	Law	1	Australian	Trinity College	2 Mobiles, Facebook, email, Flickr YouTube, blog
M.Gp.4.iii	F	Mathematics	1	Australian	St Hilda's	2 Mobiles, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, blog
M.Gp.4.iiii	F	History	1	Australian	Ormond College	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, Flickr, YouTube, blog, landline
M.Gp.4.iv	F	Economics and History	1	Australian	Trinity College	3 Mobiles, Facebook, email, Flickr YouTube, landline
M.Gp.4.vi	F	Law	1	Australian	St Hilda's	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, Flickr, YouTube, blog, landline (at home)

| M.Gp.5.i | M | Biology | 1 | Australian | Ormond College | 1 Mobile, Facebook, email, Flickr, landline |

M.Gp.5.ii	M	Law	1	Australian	Trinity College	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, Flickr, YouTube,
M.Gp.5.iii	M	Biology	1	Australian	College Square	Facebook, landline
M.Gp.5.iiii	F	English Literature	1	Australian	College Square	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, Flickr, YouTube, landline
M.Gp.5.iv	F	History	1	Australian	Trinity College	3 Mobiles, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube,
M.Gp.5.v	F	Economics	1	Australian	St Hilda's	1 Mobile, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, blog, landline

M.Gp.6.i	M	Chemistry	1	Australian	Trinity College	1 Mobile, Facebook, Flickr, landlir
M.Gp.6.ii	M	Chemistry	1	Australian	Trinity College	2 Mobiles, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube,
M.Gp.6.iii	F	Law	1	Australian	St Hilda's	1 Mobile, Facebook
M.Gp.6.iiii	F	Chemistry	1	Australian	St Hilda's	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, Flickr,
M.Gp.6.iv	F	Chemistry	1	Australian	St Hilda's	1 Mobile, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, landline
M.Gp.6.vi	F	Chemistry	1	Australian	St Hilda's	1 Mobile, Facebook, Flickr, landlir (at home)

Appendix A.4 the University of York focus group data table

Code	Sex	Subject	Year	Resident/International Student	Accommodation	Social Media
Y.Gp.1.i	M	Chemistry	1	British	James College	1 Mobile, **Facebook, email, Flickr,** YouTube
Y.Gp.1.ii	M	Biology	1	British	James College	1 Mobile, Facebook, email,
Y.Gp.1.iii	F	Psychology	1	British	James College	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, Flickr, YouTube landline
Y.Gp.1.iiii	F	History	1	British	Langwith College	2 Mobiles, Facebook, email, landline
Y.Gp.1.iv	F	History	1	British	Langwith College	3 Mobile, Facebook, email, landlin

Y.Gp.2.i	M	Biology	1	British	Goodrick College	1 Mobile, Facebook, MySpace ema landline (at home)
Y.Gp.2.ii	M	Chemistry	1	British	Goodrick College	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, landlin
Y.Gp.2.iii	F	Chemistry	1	British	Goodrick College	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, landlin

Y.Gp.3.i	M	English Literature	1	British	Derwent College	1 Mobile, Facebook, MySpace ema landline (at home)
Y.Gp.3.ii	F	History	1	British	Vanbrugh College	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, landlin
Y.Gp.3.iii	F	History	1	British	Vanbrugh College	1 Mobile, Facebook, Bebo, MySpace, Flickr, YouTube email, landline
Y.Gp.3.iiii	F	History	1	British	Vanbrugh College	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, Flickr, YouTube landline (at home)
Y.Gp.3.iv	F	History	1	British	Vanbrugh College	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, Flickr, YouTube landline

Y.Gp.4.i	F	Psychology	1	British	Halifax College	1 Mobile, Facebook, Flikcr, YouTube email, landline
Y.Gp.4.ii	F	Psychology	1	British	Halifax College	2 Mobiles, PDA, Facebook, email, landline (at home)
Y.Gp.4.iii	F	Psychology	1	British	James College	1 Mobile, Facebook, Bebo, MySpace, Flickr, YouTube email, landline
Y.Gp.5.i	M	Mathematics	1	British	Private Residence	1 Mobile, Facebook, YouTube email, landline (at home)
Y.Gp.5.ii	M	Psychology	1	British	Derwent College	2 Mobiles, PDA, Facebook, email,

						landline (at home)
Y.Gp.5.iii	M	Mathematics	1	British	James College	1 Mobile, Facebook, Bebo, MySpace, email, landline (at home
Y.Gp.5.iiii	M	Mathematics	1	British	Halifax College	1 Mobile, Facebook, Flikcr, YouTube email, landline (at home
Y.Gp.5.iv	F	Mathematics	1	British	Derwent College	2 Mobiles, PDA, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, email, landline (at home

Y.Gp.6.i	M	Sociology	1	British	Private Residence	1 Mobile, Facebook, YouTube email, landline
Y.Gp.6.ii	M	Sociology	1	British	Derwent College	1 Mobile, Facebook, email, landlin (at home)
Y.Gp.6.iii	M	Sociology	1	British	James College	1 Mobile, Facebook, Bebo, MySpace, email, landline (at home
Y.Gp.6.iiii	F	Sociology	1	British	Private Residence	1 Mobile, Facebook, Flikcr, YouTube email, landline (at home
Y.Gp.6.iv	F	Sociology	1	British	Private Residence	2 Mobiles, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, email
Y.Gp.6.vi	F	Sociology	1	British	Alcuin College	2 Mobiles, Facebook, YouTube, email, landline (at home)

MANAGING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AT UNIVERSITY, INTERVIEW AGENDA

Part one: Introduction to the research, ethics form and informed consent

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. Briefly, this research is about how university students manage their social connections. With the advent of new technology, such as mobile phones and the internet, we are choosing staying in touch with each other in different ways. Where 100 years ago we would write to one another; 25 years ago land -line phones were one of the preferred modes of communication; now there are a proliferation of communication devices that enable us to stay in touch with one another.

This research explores how and why we use such technology to stay in contact with our emotional ties family, friends, lovers etc.

The research forms part of doctoral project that is supported by the Economic and Social Science Research Council and is supervised at the University of York in the United Kingdom.

Confidentiality

All material collected in the course of the research will be treated as confidential. No individual will be identifiable in any work resulting from the analysis of the data. Guidelines set down by the British Sociology Association (BSA) will be followed to ensure anonymity.

Part two: Types of social media used
i) Background

1. If we could begin by you telling me about yourself, why you came to university and what your experiences have been like since you have moved here.
   - Connect idea of independent living
   - Context TRANSITION home/university lives
   - Establish sense of who they are/where they are from

ii) types of social media

2. Could you describe to me the type of social media user that you think you are?
   - Prompt: ease of use, length of time (per week) spent using social medias.
   - How do they keep in touch with people?
   - Why do they use social medias?

256

3. Can you remember how old you were when you had your first communication device(s)?
   - Prompt: type of device, why obtained.
   - Motivation for getting device; friends, family etc.
   - Different number of devices at home and at university.

4. Could you tell me the types of communication devices that you carry with you?
   - Prompt: more than one of the same device e.g. phones.

5. How important is the type/style of device to you?
   - Prompt: aware of and deliberately purchase latest devices e.g. mobile phone handsets etc. to be seen to 'keep up with the trends'.
   - Preferred social media device.
   - Which could they live without/

6. What type of information do you have stored on your communication device(s)?
   - Prompt: names, numbers, addresses etc.

7. Given the range of communication devices available has this made it easier for you to stay in touch with people?
   - Prompt: are they always 'switched on' and available to contact.
   - Do they engage with more virtual social activities rather than 'real life' interaction.
   - Local or global connections?

8. Whilst being able to stay in touch with others have you ever had a sense of external surveillance about your own availability/information about yourself?
   - Prompt: from friends/family/companies

9. Have you ever felt compelled to have a communications device?
   - Prompt: sense of being 'left behind' with technology, or being 'left out' of social connections.

10. Do you find yourself attaching characteristics, or emotional attachment to certain devices e.g. mobile phone, laptop etc.

11. Is there anytime or situation which you do not or would choose not to use social medias for?

Part three: The management of relationships

12. Thinking about how you communication whilst at university and outside of university term time do you find that you

257

change how you use and/or the type communication device(s) that you use?
- Prompt: difference university friends/at home friends/family.

13. How do you think that your experience of coming to university and the ways in which you manage your relationships would be different without social medias?
- Prompt: make it easier/more difficult to stay in touch.

14. Who do you stay in touch with most?
- Prompt: who contacts you the most – family/friends.

15. Have you found that the ways in which you choose to manage your relationships have changed since you came to university?
- Prompt: for better/worse.
- Is there a difference with how they choose to stay in touch compared to how people stay in touch with them?

16. Do you have relationships that are solely managed by social medias?
- Prompt: would these come to an end if they were not managed in this way, why etc.

17. Do you use social medias to communicate on a group level, for example group emails, conference calls etc?
- Prompt: 'real life' interactions do they tend to be one-on-one or meet up as a group.

18. How important is it that you are 'face-to-face' or in the same place as those you are in touch with.

19. Could you describe to me what the top 3 reasons are that motivate you to stay in touch with people and how you would go about this.

20. Could you tell me the top 3 reasons that someone will contact you and by what means?

21. How do you arrange your social activities?
- Prompt: Is it usual to make 'tentative appointments' deciding at the last minute which to keep

22a. Do you follow any 'rules' or routines when you communicate with people?
- Prompt: response time to messages,
- Preferred method of contact for friends/family,
- How would they contact someone in an emergency.

- Time and costs.

22b. (UK question: text messages) how do you decide when to communicate by text as opposed to call?
- Prompt: managing of messages; saved, reports, re-reading etc.

23. Do you think that men and women stay in touch in different ways?
- Prompt: use of different technologies, different expectations.

One of the things that I am interested in is how people manage personal relationships.

24. What is the preferred way for you to stay in touch with someone that you are interested in?
- Prompt: boyfriend/girlfriend, 'rules' of communication e.g. goodnight/good morning.

25. If you wanted to end a relationship with someone how would you go about this?
- Prompt: their own experience of this.

26. Have you ever initiated a relationship, friendship or otherwise, as a result of meeting through technology e.g. online?
- Prompt: types of relationship, friendship, lovers; how many relationships
- How did they meet, chatroom etc.
- If they have not initiated a relationship in this way, would they in the future.

27. Have you used communication technology to locate someone that you had lost touch with?
- Prompt: why, how and who.

28. Do you have digital content about yourself available?
- Prompt: blog, user profile, Frienshter, MySpace, facebook etc
- Motivation: keep up with friends, sense of community
- Type of information stored

29. Have you experienced difficulties in communicating with others by using technology?

30. What are the positive experiences that you have had using communication technology?

31. Do you have any other general comments that you would like to add about how you use social medias?

Part four: Close of interview, basic social demographic information
- Educational background
- University course
- Residence during term time
- Prompt: postcode
- Residence outside of term time
    - Prompt: postcode

- Occupations of parents
    - Prompt: family postcode (if not living at home)

Any other questions?

Thank you for taking part in this interview. All information will be treated confidentially. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

ETHICS FORM

Aims of the research

This research is about keeping in touch. With the advent of new technology, such as mobile phones, the internet etc, people are choosing staying in touch with each other in different ways. Where 100 years ago people would write to one another; 25 years ago land -line phones were one of the preferred modes of communication, now there are a proliferation of communication devices to enable us to stay in touch with one another.

This research explores how we use technology to stay in contact with family, friends, lovers etc.

The research forms part of a Doctoral project that is supported by the Economic and Social Science Research Council and supervised at the University of York.

Confidentiality

All material collected in the course of the research will be treated as confidential. No in individual will be identifiable in any work resulting from the analysis of the data. Guidelines set down by the British Sociology Association will be followed to ensure the anonymity of participants.

I agree to take part in the interview...

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